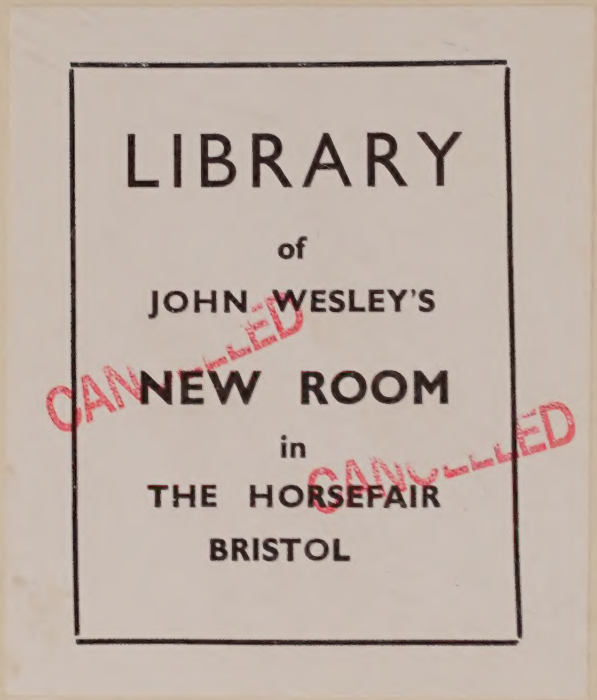
THE HEBREW PROPHET AND THE MODERN PREACHER

H. J. PICKETT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THE TWENTY-SECOND HARTLEY LECTURE:

The Hebrew Prophet and the Modern Preacher.

BY

HENRY J. PICKETT.

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To
My Wife.

PREFACE.

THIS book has been written under the pressure of a deep and ever-deepening conviction, that our supreme need in this twentieth century is a truly prophetic ministry, and that the man who stands in the pulpit, whether minister or layman, should always realise that his only right to be there rests upon an obligation he cannot evade, to be a speaker for God.

A glance round the world of to-day, particularly since the colossal events of the Great War (1914—1919), supplies the background and confirmation of the need for such a ministry. At the same time it calls for the answer of the prophet, who, as one standing in the foreground of a divinely-ordained succession, now in this form, now in that, never fails to point out to the world the way of life, and prepares the path of the world's Redeemer.

The Hebrew prophets have always appealed to the writer, as those whose moral passion, whose insistence upon Divine ideals, with their application to individual and national life, declare what is permanently essential, for all times and for all peoples.

These, so the writer feels, are the ideals for which the pulpit should always plead. To make them actual should represent the sum of the preacher's training and effort. With less than this no preacher can ever be content. And to aid in thus making actual the " City of God " seen in vision, is to stand in the true succession of the prophets.

As these convictions have determined the plan, so they express the whole purpose of the book, and the writer asks that it may be perused and estimated entirely from this point of view.

While accepting modern critical results, the book makes no claim to critical ability. Yet it may be permitted the writer to express his deep sense of obligation to a long list of those whose scholarly contributions to the study of the prophets have assisted a ministry particularly happy in the service of his own Church, while it has helped to make the work of this Lecture a labour of love.

In this acknowledgment of thanks the writer

would make special and grateful mention of the unfailing kindness of that eminent Biblical scholar, Prof. A. S. Peake, D.D., whose contributions to the understanding of the Holy Scriptures have made all students his debtors. In the midst of his crowded and busy life, Dr. Peake has kindly read the Lecture through in manuscript, making valuable suggestions and corrections. For such expert and willing help, the writer is deeply conscious of an obligation he can never repay. At the same time, it has given him ground for confidence in sending the book forth, with the prayer, that it may lead to a renewed interest in the study of the prophets, and to a better appreciation of the place they fill in the gradual unfolding of the growing whole of truth.

SOUTHPORT,
May, 1922.

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PART I.

THE HEBREW PROPHET.

"THE word prophecy is much misused; it seems narrowed to prediction merely. That is not the main sense of the Hebrew word translated 'prophet'; it means one whose mind bubbles up and pours forth as a fountain, from inner, divine spontaneities, revealing God. Prediction is a very minor part of prophecy. The great matter is to reveal and outpour the God-like suggestions pressing for birth in the soul."

Walt Whitman.

THE HEBREW PROPHET
AND THE
MODERN PREACHER.

CHAPTER I.

The Prophet in Early Israel.

I.

THE selection, training, development, and subsequent service of Israel, to the gradually unfolding purposes of the Divine love, offers a theme of entrancing and unfailing interest to the student of religion and of life. On the one side, it is to discover, that while the crude, nomadic portion of the old Semitic world shared with all peoples the universal faculty of religion—the innate religious feeling and longing—they possessed this faculty to an eminent degree, rendering them peculiarly sensitive to religious training, and capable of taking them to positions of religious attainment, unique among the peoples of the world.

On the other side, it is to mark with ever-growing adoration and wonder the wisdom, the patience,

and the abounding goodness of God, in the selection and culture of such a people, knowing them "only of all the families of the earth,"[1] and making them the instrument of purposes now revealed in the light of universal history.

Among the factors used by God in the training and development of Israel as His appointed organ, the prophet takes an early and conspicuous place. Indeed, the records of Israel's early wandering and settlement in Canaan, the contact with the existing civilisation and the religious cults found there, the peculiar susceptibility of these simple children of the desert to external conditions, all warrant the assertion, that even thus early in the history, the prophets saved the religion of Yahweh from being submerged by the prevailing and even rampant Baalism, with its degrading rites.[2]

We need only refer now, in passing, to the work of Moses and the Judges, and the bold, decisive challenge of Elijah. The later history, as we shall see, shows just what might have been expected, that as Israel grew, the work of the prophet grew also, alike in prominence, in influence, and in right of leadership.

Nor, until the final overthrow of Israel, and the gradual decline of prophecy into apocalyptic, following the Exile, did the prophet cease to figure as the chief of God's appointed instruments, for instruction, warning, and guidance.

[1] Amos iii. 2.
[2] Prof. W. R. Smith, *Prophets of Israel*, p. 32.

II.

And here—remembering the purpose of this Lecture—we must pay grateful tribute to the workers in the realms of modern Biblical scholarship and the science of Comparative Religion, for the increased values belonging to the study of the prophet and prophecy in early Israel.

The special gain of these researches, enriching the faith and the preaching of our own and all coming times, is the insistence of the best scholarship upon the unique greatness of Israel's seers, as contrasted with the diviners, soothsayers, and magicians of the surrounding nations of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and their own Canaan.

Points of similarity are there, as we might expect. The prophet in Israel was a growth as well as a gift. The earliest manifestations of the prophet's work shares the conditions of the time out of which it came. Only so could it find its point of contact, and enter upon any ministry of usefulness.

Are we not all in this respect the product of our age, and how, in any other way, could we serve our own generation? It is not the Divine method—let us reverently add, it is not the *rational* method—"to blind with excess of light." Development is as great a mercy as it is a necessity. And the modern view of the prophet is an even greater proof of the Divine reality, and the Divine government of the world, than the older representation of the prophet as a direct herald from the Divine court,

uttering predictions bearing upon peoples and centuries far away, and even—as is now urged by some amongst us—receiving their fulfilment through the agony of the late European War!

Prophecy is the statement of eternal truth suited to the immediate occasion; and so, while not excluding prediction, to which reference will be made later,[1] the prophets were first of all preachers to their own generation, their witness and their message being at first confined to those who owed the duty of loyalty to their own national Deity.

The Hebrew prophets survived, and, by immeasurable distances, surpassed the dreamers and visionaries of contemporary religions—(1) In their personal character and moral passion; (2) In the content of their message; and, greatest of all, (3) In their unvarying insistence upon the character and the purity of Israel's God. And it is not too much to add, that in so living and speaking, they not only saved their nation, they saved religion itself from the corruptions of contemporary faiths.

With this discussion in mind, we shall not be surprised to find, that, alike the name and earliest work of the prophet bear the stamp of their local environment.

Western Asia, the Semitic home of the Israelitish people, had long been the home of ecstatic prophecy. Indeed, go where we will among primitive peoples, we shall find nothing answering to what moderns have pretentiously described as Agnosticism. The Supernatural, though mysterious and awful, was not

[1] See pp. 33–35.

the Unknowable. As though springing from a common religious root, underlying all their superstitious, often repulsive heathen practices, the student traces the following beliefs:—

(1) The mysterious cause of life and movement in the world, not only is, but can be known.

(2) It is given to some to know this power called Deity on more intimate terms.

(3) The Deity can be consulted, influenced, appeased, won. His favour can be secured, or his displeasure incurred.

(4) Each tribe or nation had its own distinctive Deity, with a seat or centre from which he worked, and where he could be most readily consulted. He was always specially favourable to the territory and to the people over which he ruled.

(5) The will of the Deity could be ascertained through dream,[1] divination,[2]—that is, by consultation at an oak on the part of one specially gifted, such as a seer,[3] or by extraordinary moods of excitement and ecstasy leading to convulsions and self-inflicted physical suffering,[4] or by consulting the Urim and Thummim, which included, so it seems, the method of casting lots with sacred stones,[5] or under the stimulus of music.[6]

Out of such a soil as this religion itself grew, and the Semitic mind, peculiarly susceptible, as we have

[1] Gen. xxviii. 12; xxxvii. 5; xl. 8; Judges vii. 13, 15.
[2] Judges ix. 37. [3] 1 Sam. ix. 9.
[4] 1 Sam. xviii. 10; 1 Kings xviii. 26, 28. [5] 1 Sam. xiv. 41.
[6] 1 Sam. xvi. 16, 17.

seen, to these universal intuitions, readily responded, so that we can trace their operation in all the life of Israel. These beliefs and practices were the inheritance of the Israelites, as our faith is our inheritance, and, brought by "a way they knew not," into a land where Baal-worship was as common as its trees and stones, there is little wonder they were slow to appreciate the loftiness of the purer faith of Yahweh, and that for long, weary generations, the prophets struggled to set them free.

Little wonder, also, that the first beginnings of prophecy up to the time of the monarchy were associated with such crude methods of ascertaining the mind of their Deity as we have indicated above. This may be illustrated by the visit of Saul to Samuel,[1] as though Yahweh's presence could be reached only through the dwelling-place of the seer; the use of the ephod with which Abiathar came to David,[2] evidently as an instrument of divination, and representing what was clearly a common practice.

Later, as might have been expected, such heathen methods of seeking approach to Yahweh were unsparingly condemned. Nothing could be more explicit or severe than the prohibition of Deut. xviii., 10-12 :—"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or one that useth divination, one that practiseth augury, or an enchanter, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a consulter with a familiar spirit, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For whoso-

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 6–14. [2] 1 Sam. xxiii. 9.

ever doeth these things is an abomination unto the Lord; and because of these abominations the Lord thy God doth drive them out from before thee."

But this takes us on to a time much later than the early monarchy, when the prophet had displaced the diviner, and condemns the heathen practices at the time when Deuteronomy was written, rather than those of the primitive conditions of society we are now discussing.

The whole passage just quoted strikingly illuminates the development of the Hebrew religion, and enables us with adoring wonder to mark how completely the conquering faith of Yahweh, under the guidance of the prophets, transcended the then ancient and corrupting religions surrounding Israel. The fact remains—and it is invaluable as evidence—that while outside Israel the nations following these practices gradually declined to the grossest sensuousness, and finally to utter ruin, Israel, led by her prophets, gradually rose to the sublimest monotheism, and prepared the way for the supreme and final revelation of Jesus, as the world's only hope and Redeemer.

The position has been so well stated by Dr. G. C. Joyce, and is so fundamental to a right understanding of Hebrew prophecy, that we take the liberty of quoting his words:—

> "Of recent years there has been a tendency to exaggerate the amount of resemblance between the religion of Israel, and the other religions of Western Asia.
>
> "Of this tendency a striking example is

afforded by Winckler's representation of prophecy as a common possession of such religions, and his insistence that Hebrew prophecy was no more than a peculiar type of a widely-extended institution.

"Divination was undoubtedly a common institution in the ancient world, and in Israel the diviner was the spiritual predecessor of the prophet.

"Divination, subject like everything else to the operation of this general law, was unquestionably undergoing a process of transformation in the heathen world no less than in Israel. In some respects the conditions which determined this process of development among the Gentile nations were not unlike those which prevailed in Palestine.

"We need not, therefore, be surprised if we discover something analogous to prophecy elsewhere. But we shall certainly find that the points of resemblance are superficial, and of quite minor importance compared with the points of difference. For the paramount condition which determined the development of true prophecy in Israel, was the controlling presence of the Spirit of God

"Where this was wanting there could be no product of permanent spiritual value for the human race. Human faculties, normal or supernormal, were powerless in themselves to see the heavenly light and follow it. Yet these same faculties, created originally by the

Spirit of Life, and now used by Him as His means of communication with man, display under His influence an ever-widening range of activity. The Prophets of Israel are the men in whom these capacities are found in a pre-eminent degree, and who willingly submit themselves to the spiritual guidance. As the process goes forward, prophecy draws further and further away from its starting-point in divination, becoming more and more an institution to which there is no parallel outside the limits of revelation."[1]

III.

What Dr. Joyce calls "the paramount condition which determined the development of true prophecy in Israel," is first seen in Samuel, who may be correctly described as standing midway between the old Semitic "seer" or "diviner," and that line of prophets, who, from his time onward, down to the Exile, form the outstanding personalities of Israel's history. While we may not say that Samuel is the founder of Hebrew prophecy—for the movement is immeasurably greater than any one individual—yet he is, strictly speaking, the first of the Hebrew prophets.

True, the term "prophet" or "prophetess," is found earlier in the records. It is applied to

[1] *The Inspiration of Prophecy*, pp. 58–59. The reader is also referred to the article on *Old Testament Prophecy*, in Dr. Peake's invaluable *Commentary on the Bible*, p. 426.

Abram,[1] Moses,[2] Aaron,[3] Eldad and Medad,[4] Miriam,[5] and Deborah.[6] But no evidence is forthcoming that the name was known in the days of any of these early leaders, and we are led to conclude that the term, being familiar in the days when the record of their deeds was made, is applied to them by the writers, as though in actual use at the time.

Cornill, in his exceedingly able book,[7] dismisses the claim above made for Samuel, as "a legend of a later period," and describes Elijah as "the first prophet of Israel on a grand scale." Against that view, however, Prof. Davidson,[8] speaks of "prophecy founded as an institution by Samuel, though existing sporadically in individual members long before his time." Dr. Joyce[9] describes Samuel as he who, "beginning life as a diviner, died a prophet and the founder of the prophetic order. There is reason to think that it was he who created the Schools of the Prophets."

However this may be, it is certain that under Samuel a distinct development in the view of the prophet and his work may be noted. For the first time he insisted upon and illustrated the more spiritual conception of the relation between God and man, which constitutes the essential element of the prophetic function. And this gradually thrust into the background, until it quite eliminated, the older and more material elements. It is signifi-

[1] Gen. xx. 7. [2] Deut. xxxiv. 10. [3] Exod. vii. 1.
[4] Numbers xi. 26. [5] Exod. xv. 20. [6] Judges iv. 4.
[7] *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 29. [8] *O.T. Prophecy*, p. 5.
[9] *The Inspiration of Prophecy*, p. 49.

cant that while the sacred or priestly lot is found in use during the period of Saul[1] and David,[2] from this time it entirely disappears. So also the ark is displaced, although this was an emblem peculiar to Israel, and represented Yahweh's presence to them, so much so, that when the ark of God is taken,[3] the glory has departed from Israel.

Yet Samuel proved that Yahweh's presence was independent of this crude emblem, and hence in its old form as Yahweh's throne, the ark disappears. "So wholly has its original meaning been forgotten, and so utterly have its earlier associations faded away, that Deuteronomy was able to use it as the place beside which the decalogue was stored. When an emblem is made into a chest for holding something else, it is dead. Prophecy first made the ark unnecessary, and then used it to hold its own symbol of God's guidance of Israel."[4]

As is so often seen in history, the circumstances of the time gave an outstanding personality like Samuel his opportunity. It was a period of great transition. It was a time of crisis also, for the threatened Philistine invasion was a real menace, and, under the growing weakness of Eli, and the profligacy of his sons, the very life of Israel was at stake.

The nomadic life and even the desire for it, had given place to the settled community. The people had come to understand something of the enormous resources of Canaan's fertile soil. They were

[1] 1 Sam. xiv. 36, 37. [2] 1 Sam. xxiii. 9. [3] 1 Sam. iv. 22.
[4] Dr. A. C. Welch, *The Religion of Israel*, p. 44.

beginning to have a stake in the land. Growing habits of industry, securing to them rapidly increasing possessions, meant the strengthening of a common bond, a growing sense of nationhood, which at last found expression in the desire for a visible king, with the opportunity to become as the nations round about them.

Through all this movement,—as yet the greatest Israel had known—Samuel was the one strong man, recognised and held in honour, as "the man of God."[1] As the individual grew in value as the possible oracle of Yahweh, the authority of external mediums was weakened, and the practice of resorting to them was relinquished. This serves to account for the explanatory verse in 1 Samuel ix. 9, evidently the insertion of a later scribe, pointing out that the place of the seer in earlier Israel, now belonged to the prophets of their own time.

This will enable us, with some hope of accuracy, to examine the important question of Samuel's relation to what has been described as "the schools of the Prophets." As one who neither by training nor by temperament was a warrior, caring nothing for military pursuits, but as a priest, trained in the sanctuary, interested beyond all else in knowing the mind and doing the will of God—witness his early and eager response as a child to Divine intuitions[2]—we are not surprised to find him linked up with these groups of religious enthusiasts.

Dr. O. C. Whitehouse definitely describes the term "schools," applied to these guilds or societies,

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 6, 7, 8. [2] 1 Sam. iii. 4–10.

"as altogether a misnomer."[1] It is likely enough that for so early a time, the term is one altogether too advanced and formal. But they were a very numerous body of men. They powerfully influenced the life of their time, and, despite inevitable exaggeration and even fraud—like the monastic institutions of the early Christian centuries in their purest form—rendered valuable service to the religion of Yahweh.

Dr. Payne Smith claims for Samuel, that he was the founder of the monarchy in Israel, of the prophetic order also, and that "one of his noblest and most important efforts for the public good was the institution of the schools of the prophets."[2] The evidence for this is not forthcoming, and we are inclined to think the statement is too strong. It is more likely that, at first, these were voluntary groups of men—not always necessarily young men—drawn together by a common religious interest, who met to encourage and instruct each other, to recite together such history and poetry of their race as they knew, and by the practice of vocal and instrumental music to excite feelings of religious rhapsody.

That Samuel, keenly interested in the intellectual and religious condition of Israel, should be closely associated with these men, is perfectly natural. Ramah,[3] as we know, was his home. And at Naioth,[4] or Neraioth, meaning "the pastures,"

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 107.
[2] *The Expositor*, 1st Series, vol. iii., p. 251.
[3] 1 Sam. vii. 17. [4] 1 Sam. xix. 19.

in Ramah, a company of these enthusiasts had settled, dwelling in booths or tents occupying the pastures. When it is said that they were "prophesying," the meaning probably is, that they were engaged in their religious exercises, mainly consisting of music and singing, and repeating the oral knowledge of their time. We find later, that when David, with the captains of the host, established the musical services of the Sanctuary, they appointed the sons of Asaph "to prophesy with harps."[1] Among these men—and they numbered many hundreds, scattered at such sacred places as Bethel, on the road from Shechem to Jerusalem,[2] at Gibeah of Benjamin, or "The Hill,"[3] at Jericho,[4] and Gilgal,[5]—it is natural to conclude that many would be studious, eager to learn, and keenly bent on the service of their national God.

The suggestion therefore, that they were taught to read and write, that they began the series of chronicles forming the material of later Scribes,[6] and that out of them came the succession of those inspired histories and songs which form part of the world's best treasure, commands our assent, while it indicates the particular value of their contribution to the religious development of the nation.

Of the later references to these guilds or brotherhoods, it is not necessary now to write. Our purpose has been to examine Samuel's relation to them, and, remembering his intense spiritual aims, we

[1] 1 Chron. xxv. 1–3. [2] 2 Kings ii. 3. [3] 1 Sam. x. 5, 10.
[4] 2 Kings ii. 5. [5] 2 Kings ii. 1; iv. 38.
[6] 1 Chron. xxix. 29.

cannot but think he would seek to turn them to the best account, encouraging their intellectual possibility, and discouraging the tendency to professionalism.

It is this practice of "prophesying for gain," which the later prophets denounce. Obadiah "hid a hundred of them" from the rage of Jezebel.[1] When, at the end of Ahab's reign, Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire of Yahweh before going to Ramoth Gilead to battle, four hundred were gathered together before the allied kings, and prophesied in Yahweh's name.[2] Elijah and Elisha in turn, each became leaders and heroes of these guilds,[3] nor is it possible to say, how, through the example and teaching of their leaders, the earnest and faithful of such guilds would spread the truer knowledge of Yahweh, and keep alive the truer faith among their people.

IV.

If Samuel, as we have seen, stood midway between the old and the new, mediating the transition from Semitic divination to the more direct, and spiritual Hebrew prophecy, Elijah stands also midway between the nomadic, desert-loving enthusiast for God, and the most dauntless and courageous of that line of prophets, who were prepared to risk everything, even life itself, in loyalty to their ideal.

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 4. [2] 1 Kings xxii. 11, 12.
[3] 2 Kings ii. 7; iv. 38; vi. 1–7.

Cornill's description of Elijah already quoted, as "the first prophet of Israel on a grand scale," is entirely justified when we take into account the nature of his conflict, the fact that he alone of all the nation measured the crisis and faced it, and particularly the vastness of his achievement for Israel. Save in the case of the One "greater than Elijah," history records nothing finer, more daring, or more successful than this masterful stroke of the Prophet from Gilead.

In reviewing the early history of Israel, and in estimating our debt to these old pathfinders and heroes, we need often to remind ourselves that the later monotheistic faith of Judaism, and the comparative purity of its religious observances, were gained at tremendous cost. With a great price Israel obtained this freedom, and what has been aptly described as "the titanic struggle" of Elijah, indicates the price at which it was secured. In him, the false found its uncompromising opponent, the true its untiring and most competent mouthpiece.

The position in Israel at the time of Elijah's sudden and dramatic entrance into the history was unlike anything the people had known. We have already referred to the prevalence of Baal-worship in Canaan. Side by side with the worship of Yahweh—Israel's God—there went on the worship of the Baalim, the local divinities of the Canaanites. This may be described as the normal situation. Terrible as it was, owing to the sensuous and utterly degrading character of the heathen

religious rites, and therefore a constant menace to the true development of Israel, it persisted long after the time of Elijah, and called forth the unsparing condemnation of the great eighth-century prophets.

The immediate occasion of Elijah's startling challenge, was the fact, that, for the first time in Israel, a foreign deity was introduced and placed side by side with Yahweh, as though in friendly alliance and on equal terms. This was brought about by the marriage of Ahab, Israel's king, with Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, king of Phœnicia. Ethbaal had been a priest of the cult of Ashtoreth, and had reached his throne through the murder of a possible rival. The new queen, strong, resolute, and utterly unscrupulous, was actively promoting the cult of the new worship, and naturally desired to establish the supremacy of her national and favourite deity. To gratify his wife, Ahab had built a splendid temple and altar to the Tyrian god in the capital, Samaria, where four hundred priests in gorgeous vestments, worshipped the idol, and these, with the priests of Astarte, eight hundred and fifty in all, fed in splendour at Jezebel's table.[1]

There is no need to denounce Ahab as a monster. Like many another since, he was weak where he should have been strong, and, bearing the name of a king, he became a mere tool in the hands of his crafty and tyrannous wife. Though himself holding to the worship of Yahweh, naming his two

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 19.

sons, Ahaziah and Jehoram, and even his daughter Athaliah, after Yahweh (a most unusual thing for a woman), what Ahab desired and evidently thought possible, was a compromise, by which the worship of Yahweh as Israel's God, and the Tyrian Baal, could proceed side by side. For Elijah Yahweh and Baal were mutually exclusive. Israel must choose between them, it cannot have both. Ahab apparently took the line, Why not have both? He saw no evil in the religious syncretism which combined for his people the worship of both deities.

In building and endowing a temple of Baal for his wife, Ahab did no more than Solomon had done without exciting opposition on the part of his people.[1] But Solomon's day did not produce an Elijah. The probability is, that but for Elijah, Ahab's weak surrender to Jezebel would not have met with any serious challenge. Many earnest, sincere souls in Israel, "who had not bowed the knee to Baal," would have been pained, but, beyond individual protests, the presumption is that nothing would have been done.

The idea of one Supreme God, and all other Baals or Lords as non-existent and false, this had yet to come. And it is the glory of Elijah's challenge and triumph, that, for Israel at least, he made it clear that Yahweh could have no rival in His own land. By so much did he forward the slow advance to the later monotheistic faith. "Where He was worshipped, no other god could be acknowledged in any sense. This was a proposition of tremendous

[1] 1 Kings xi. 7.

practical issues. It really involved the political isolation of the nation, for as things then stood, it was impossible to have friendship and alliance with other peoples if their gods were proscribed in Israel's land."[1] What we are now concerned with is the fact—and we shall see it again and again in history—that the prophet, caring more for the honour of God than for life or nation, saved religion from the syncretism which would have surrendered it to the prevailing heathen cults.

Of Elijah's dearest friend, disciple, and successor, Elisha,[2] it is not necessary now to write at length. Possibly—as happened in England in the days immediately following Cromwell—Elisha has suffered from the overwhelming supremacy and towering greatness of his master and teacher. During his long life, estimated by some as running close into a century, he filled a large place in Israel's life, and remained passionately loyal to Yahweh. Though Baal-worship still prevailed in the land,[3] there is no record of any protest raised by Elisha against it. In his recourse to the use of the minstrel,[4] there is rather a recurrence to the lower level of the diviner, and in the toleration, bordering on a compromise unthinkable to Elijah, such as that allowed in the case of Naaman,[5] we certainly miss the moral passion of the prophet.

Yet, to have won as he did, and retained up to the last, the admiration and affection of the "sons

[1] Prof. W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 80.
[2] 1 Kings xix. 16. [3] 2 Kings x. 18.
[4] 2 Kings iii. 15. [5] 2 Kings v. 18.

of the prophets," being for more than half a century their acknowledged head and teacher, indicates real qualities of leadership, and proves the possession of considerable staying power. That his work of teaching, at any rate, with the more earnest and sincere of these guilds or brotherhoods, would pass into the permanent life of the nation, as fertilizing streams of blessing, is a very strong presumption, which, were proof possible, we should undoubtedly find amply confirmed.

Full of the ministries of human kindness and help—a friend of the common people—Elisha filled also a very large place in the nation, as the adviser and reprover of kings. Through all the revolution which led to the overthrow of the house of Omri, and the complete defeat of Tyrian Baalism, Elisha illustrated and confirmed his title as "the man of God." He discovered the man who led it,[1] and supplied the guidance and the inspiration to Israel. Right to the end, his zeal for Yahweh and for his land remained unshaken,[2] and he passes to his reward, having earned the grateful affection of those he served so well.

V.

From the work of Elisha, as Sir G. A. Smith has reminded us, "there are but forty years to Amos,"[3] and, with Amos, we reach the first of the literary

[1] 2 Kings ix. 1–3. [2] 2 Kings xiii. 14–15.
[3] *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. i., p. 30.

prophets. While our study of Israel's early seers reveals the paucity of available first-hand information—no written word of any of them having come down to us—it also serves to bring out the distinguishing characteristic of the religion to which the earlier prophets witnessed. And we touch permanent truth—urgently needing emphasis in our own, as in every time—when we dwell upon the two ways by which the faith of early Israel, gradually assisted and directed by the prophets, declared its Divine origin. First: In the character of its God. Second: In the life and service of His followers.

As to the first:—Not only was there nothing like it in that old heathen world, there has been nothing like it since; there is, outside the Christian world, nothing like it to-day. Possessing as the Semites did, a genius for religion; imitative, susceptible, untutored, and coming into a land every part of which was full of sacred groves, high places of sacrificial worship, and crudely-made temples, nothing could have saved them from the corruptions and excesses of their heathen neighbours. but the steady insistence of the prophets, that theirs was a God hating iniquity, loving righteousness and truth.

The Semites had no monopoly of the religious faculty. The instinct for it is as universal as life. The nations round them had their gods, whom their peoples worshipped. Yet, spite of their worship, and often because of the degrading nature of it, other nations and peoples, without exception,

declined to ruin and final extinction. Their deities were even as they, given to partialism and change, they were passional, prejudiced, local and fickle.

"Israel is the only nation we know of that never had a mythology, the only people who never differentiated the deity sexually." [1] So deep does this last trait extend, that the Hebrew language is not even competent to form the word "goddess." That there were many in Israel who succumbed to the prevailing idolatry, that the nation itself was slow to understand the greatness of their privilege, and the loftiness of their faith, was the agonizing complaint of the prophets, while it cost Israel centuries of suffering, and eventually the loss of the nation itself. Yet, though the nation perished, Israel, of all the peoples of the earth, survived, and its survival is due to its acknowledgment and ultimate acceptance of Yahweh, the God of all the earth.

The insistence of this truth is urgently called for in the pulpits of to-day. The loftier our view of God, the more accurate will be our interpretation of man, the more certain our mastery of life. A great doctrine of God is the chief want of our twentieth century.

As to the second:—As was the Deity, so must be those who spoke for Him, and whom He called His people. A God hating iniquity and loving purity could neither be bought by offerings, nor deceived by empty promises. Only as human character gradually shared His ideals and embodied

[1] Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 23.

them in life and deed, could men rise to profitable intercourse with Him, or to any effective service of their fellow-men. Nor, except in the glory of His own self-revelation, and the uniqueness of His own inimitable teaching of it, had Jesus anything higher to say than this.

How the work of the prophets assisted the understanding of the character of God, and the correlative service of man, how it prepared the way for the final revelation of Jesus, we shall see in later chapters. Meanwhile, the work of the earlier prophets down to Elijah had been well done, and they have placed the generations under permanent obligation to them for their pathfinding ministry.

CHAPTER II.

The Prophet's Training and Call.

A STUDY of Israel's early history, enables us more worthily to appreciate the place and the work of the prophet. It justifies the statement, that not once only, but again and again, the purer faith and truer life of Israel were saved by his devoted and unsparing sacrifice. As a simple statement of fact, the prophets were not only in conflict as we have seen, with the leaders of Israel, they were constantly resisting the idolatrous tendencies of the people themselves.

The fight for the supremacy of Yahweh was unceasing on their part. The god or the "baal," was the god of the tribe or nation, not of the individual. And the fortunes of the god, so to say, ebbed and flowed with the decline or prosperity of the nation. If the nation suffered reverse, the deity was unpropitious or weak. If the nation was prosperous, the deity was superior to the surrounding "baals." Ultimately, as we shall see, the struggle for Yahweh's supremacy was won, though only through long delay and suffering, involving even the loss of the nation itself!

It is necessary to remember that Yahweh was not originally the god or baal of Palestine. His true home was at Sinai. He had conquered Palestine for Himself and for His followers. And here, worshipped as Yahweh was by His own people at the existing heathen altars, or side by side with the Moabite Chemosh,[1] the Zidonian Ashtoreth,[2] or the Ammonite Milcom,[3] it was often for the peoples, an interesting contest between (to them) actual deities; and they took pleasure in it, as those who delight in the success of a favorite champion. Against all this degrading and syncretizing tendency, the prophets of Israel were the true defence of the nation, nor, but for their heroic and unsparing effort, could Israel have won through.

But, leaving the further story of their later struggle, and how, and at what cost their victory was achieved, it is necessary at this point to turn aside to the study of the men themselves, and discover, if we can, how it was they were so far in advance of their people, and the secret of their unique and abiding success.

I.

It is significant, that for the purposes of this inquiry, we are compelled practically to ignore the prophetic guilds or brotherhoods belonging to the period of the early monarchy. We have

[1] Numbers xxi. 29. [2] Deut. i. 4; 1 Kings xi. 5.
[3] 1 Kings xi. 5; 2 Kings xxiii. 13.

already seen that these companies of men can claim no right to the somewhat formal and high-sounding title of "the schools of the prophets." It is quite probable, that under the direction of Samuel, Elijah and Elisha, they did good work and served a useful ministry. They may have assisted the education in writing, in the preservation of worthy tradition, and—though we have no evidence for it—paved the way for the preservation of later prophetic utterance.

But the later history reveals them as a paid, professional class, uttering for money what was desired of them, crying "peace, peace, when there was no peace," [1] and constituting the heart-ache and burden of men like Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, whose strongest denunciations are uttered against their ungodly pretensions and false declarations.

What is certain is, that the great prophets, whose writings are the unspeakably precious heritage of all time, had no connection with such guilds, and, for the most part, were compelled to denounce them openly, as "blind leaders of the blind."

As was the character of Israel's God, so must be those who represented Him, and who were authorized to speak in His name. Unlike the priesthood or the monarchy, which was hereditary and the right of a special class or caste, the prophet was called irrespective of any external condition whatsoever. Save on the ground of moral fitness, there is no "prophetic type," to which all must conform; nor is there anything answering to what

[1] Isa. xxx. 9–11; Jer. v. 13; vi. 13, 14; Amos ii. 12.

we may describe as a specialized order turned out after a uniform pattern.

God's representatives are forthcoming from either sex,[1] from village and town, from any and every class composing the community. Thus early in the revelation does God ignore the poor external conditions upon which man loves to dwell, and exalts to this distinctive and supremely responsible position, the most unknown and unlikely of men.

The supreme requirement is character. And character gained through long and earnest contact with God, so that, even though he knows it not, his life shines with the glory gained by secret communion.[2] The prophets were men whom God knew face to face.[3] But this last reference—though it is inherent in the office from the first—has behind it a history of development. For Deuteronomy, as we now know, belongs to a period familiar with the prophets, and sums up the best judgment of the centuries upon them.

II.

It is impossible to detach this inquiry from what has become in recent years a study of ever growing interest and importance.

We refer to the modern study of psychology, and the investigation of psychical phenomena. It belongs to the early psychology of prophetic development, that men, gifted with unusual insight,

[1] Exod. xv. 20; Judges iv. 4; 2 Kings xxii. 14.
[2] Exod. xxxiv. 29. [3] Deut. xxxiv. 10.

possessing the power to interpret dreams, claiming to be able to solve the mysteries of things—all that we should now describe as belonging to the occult—these men were for that day and for that people, prophets, seers or diviners. Attached to the courts of the heathen nations round Israel—and we find them established in Israel itself[1]—was a "prophet," not necessarily nor chiefly as a mentor of conduct, but as a referee of what was supposed to be the will of the deity.

But as Yahweh became better known, and known through and by the men He made, the office and function of the prophet rooted itself in personal fitness. Prophecy can develop only where personality counts for much. And where, beyond all other, God's society is preferred and enjoyed, the content of personality, the soil of it, so to say, is immeasurably enriched.

This surely forms part—though, as yet, only a small part—of the psychological conditions which made the prophets so definite in their repeated assurance that they had received, and were under compulsion to deliver, the "Word of Yahweh."

For it enables us to see how these men construed, alike themselves and their work. "The Lord hath spoken, who can but prophesy?"[2] Teachers of Yahweh's personal relation to Israel, they came to the knowledge of what these relations were, as is still the case, through their own experience, and through that ever-widening knowledge, with which God always rewards the obedient.

[1] 1 Chron. xxi. 9; 2 Sam. vii. 1, 2. [2] Amos iii. 8.

This repeated and insistent emphasis upon character, is strikingly brought out in the names or titles, by which the prophet came to be known in Israel.

The "Seer,"[1] visionary or diviner of the earliest time, passes with Samuel (whose relation to Yahweh was more personal and intimate, and whose obedience was more consistent) into the more enduring term "prophet." The later term signifies "The speaker for God," not so much a foreteller, as a forthteller of the thoughts, longings, and designs of the Eternal Mind.

Or again, we discover the richer content, as well as the possible greatness of the office, in the description of the prophet as "a Man of God,"[2] a designation indeed, concealing inexhaustible treasure for us even yet.

Hosea and Micah speak of the prophet as "The Man of the Spirit,"[3] while, as still his work and influence grew, he is called the "Messenger,"[4] the "Servant,"[5] the "Interpreter"[6] of Yahweh.

We dwell here upon the significance of these names or titles, as closely bearing upon the discussion in hand, and as revealing to us the prophet's point of view. The name follows the characteristic or quality or habit of the bearer, and was given because it was true in fact.

These men were too near reality, and too much absorbed with the practical business they had in

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 9.
[2] 1 Sam. ix. 6; 1 Kings xii. 22; 1 Kings xvii. 18; 2 Kings iv. 7, 9.
[3] Hos. ix. 7; Micah iii. 8. [4] Isa. xlii. 19.
[5] Mal. iii. 1. [6] Isa. xliii. 27.

hand, that of first knowing and then communicating to others the mind of Yahweh, to care or even to think of mere titles, or small questions of personal dignity. It was Yahweh who mattered to them. All else was secondary.

Nor was their belief in Yahweh a question of reason or logic brought about by any process of thought. God had spoken to them. That was enough. They had seen and heard Him in the deepest and most secret experiences of their own spirit. They were as confident of it as of their own existence. They were indeed, emphatically, "men of the Spirit."

This necessarily—as it always will—involved for them a definite course of life, a specified psychical training. It admits us to their secret. We see the price they paid for their eminence and authority. For as now, so then, men are as they think. And the prophet's absorbing thought was the honour of Yahweh.

It followed therefore, gradually but inevitably, that the master passion moulded the men, and fashioned them along great and distinctive lines. And a careful study of the individual prophets reveals certain well-defined and always present factors by which, not only the sense of vocation grew upon them and held them, but their distinctive claim, as being "speakers for God," was justified before others.

Not that this contains the whole truth, as we shall see. "A purely natural account of the psychological phenomena of prophecy cannot be true to

fact. Room must be found for the action of the supernatural."[1] And with this so necessary qualification and reminder, let us proceed to analyze the elements of the prophet's training.

(1) That the prophets were students is obvious, and needs no emphasis. That they thought deeply, felt keenly, and lived an intense life, is written across the whole story of their words and deeds. No flippant men are these, tripping across life as a stage, being selfishly concerned with mere personal or family interests.

In such a case they would not have been heard of. The Spirit of God could have found no point of contact. There would have been no psychical link, making correspondence possible. The older mechanical theory of inspiration is thus seen to be quite untenable, and men have been compelled to abandon it. It was arbitrary, unreasonable, dishonouring. The idea of Athenagoras,[2] "the Spirit making use of them (the prophets) as a flute player breathes into a flute," is exploded, in the light of a more accurate knowledge of the Bible. They worked with their brain. They wrestled, even as we do, with problem and doubt. As witness Amos away in the solitary fastnesses and upland wilds of his native Tekoa, musing over the problem of Israel's riotous wrong-doing. Or Isaiah, as he reverently waited and worshipped in the temple, overwhelmed before the vision of Yahweh's holiness, and the terrible sin and danger of his people.

[1] Prof. G. Joyce, *The Inspiration of Prophecy* p. 63
[2] *A Plea for the Christians.*

(2) That the prophets were lovers is equally obvious. This is indeed the true starting-point for understanding them. Not that their love was full-grown at first, nor was it always at the same point of intensity, any more than with the Christian of to-day. But their relation was rooted in an experience of deep, personal affection for Yahweh. It is impossible to read the agonizing lament of Amos, of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, or the heart-cry of Hosea, wrung from him by his home-tragedy of unrequited affection, as they viewed the shocking treatment of Yahweh by their people, and not feel how warm and even passionate was their own zeal for God, and the strength of their love for Him.

(3) And the love urged the Communion, the sense of kinship, the desire for that oneness with Yahweh which marks the inner experience of the prophets. This was the secret of their strength. This was to them "the meat to eat the world knew not of." This explains their growing spirituality, and the ever-increasing loftiness of their message.

And if we inquire how they reached the purer spirituality of their faith, how, rising away from the idea of location or place where it was necessary to consult Yahweh, they gained at length the view of God, not as national, but as universal, the true and only living God of all the earth,[1] the explanation is, that they had found God in the constant longing of their own hearts, and in the responsive satisfaction of His indwelling grace.

[1] Isa. liv. 5.

(4) So they became men of Knowledge, of Insight, of Interpretation. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him."[1] The relation, resting on a moral and spiritual basis, grounded in intense affection for the person and purposes of Yahweh, the consequent revelation of the Divine will was the unfailing sequel of their loyalty and trust. So Amos interprets it, "Surely the Lord will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets."[2] While Jeremiah rebukes the false prophets and exposes them, as not having "stood in the council"[3] of Yahweh!

This does not mean that the prophets were lifted beyond ordinary men in the methods of attaining general knowledge, and certainly it does not render them infallible. They needed, even as we, carefully to watch and guard the training of their faculties. They were not exempt from error. They made the mistake the apostles later made, in the first century of our era, looking as they did, for the perfect incoming of the Kingdom of God in their days. Even so the prophets anticipated "the great day of the Lord" to come in their own time, and such estimates, as they proved, needed repeated revision.

But while much of what used to be regarded as prediction in prophetic utterance,[4] has been shown to be capable of a more rational, and, may we add, diviner explanation, the element and ministry of prediction cannot be excluded or denied.

[1] Psa. xxv. 14. [2] Amos iii. 7.
[3] Jer. xxiii. 22. [4] *See also* pp. 104–7.

And here is the place to say, that in no realm of Biblical study are we under a greater debt to the work of modern scholars and scholarship, than in the study of the prophets and the prophetic literature. For it is, as Dr. Peake so well says, "in the prophetic writings more than anywhere else that we find the inmost secret of Israel's religion."[1] And it is through the unwearying labour of these devout and godly scholars, that the religion of Israel, as well as the work of the prophets who saved it, and who were its effective exponents, has been made to live anew, and we see it to be the record of a movement immeasurably more wonderful, more divine, than the older view could be.

It is now clear to us, that the immediate concern of the prophets, was the honour of Israel's God. They sought to understand His relations to and purposes for His own people. Their concern was, that the urgency of His word through them, as speakers for Him, applied to existing circumstances, should result in the quickening of the individual and national conscience, and a corresponding recognition of the obligation due to so wonderful a love as that of Yahweh. Dealing primarily, as they did, with the moral order, the application of moral truth to every-day thought and action, they found their target, so to say, in the moral constitution of man, and so, necessarily, their words would have an application far beyond their own time and land, becoming therein truly predictive.

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 45.

Being true then and there for Israel, they are true for all time and everywhere.

Taking the view of God we do, as the only all-wise and all-powerful, whose redeeming purpose of love reaches to all peoples, and on to the last syllable of recorded time; taking also the view of the trained lover, called into the "Council of Yahweh," and so sharing the secrets of the Most High; what difficulty is there in accepting the view that He could and sometimes did project before the minds of His "interpreters," visions of the coming order of His Kingdom, and the method of its unfolding?

The whole future of the Divine redemptive work lay in the fact declared by Amos, that Yahweh "of all the families of the earth, has known only Israel."[1] Such a selection encouraged hope. To the best minds of Israel such a hope was always exalting the ideal. And as, under the teaching of history and experience, the ideal expanded and heightened, the mind of the prophet often rising to ecstasy in the contemplation of it, would behold possibilities in it stretching on to an ever more glorious day. It is this which enables us to understand the statement of Prof. A. B. Davidson:— "the essence of prophecy is prediction."[2]

But to suppose that the prophets were concerned with events now happening in the twentieth century, or that God, overpowering and ignoring their ordinary faculties, gave to them minute particulars of things only now receiving fulfilment, is to remove

[1] Amos iii. 2. [2] *Old Test. Prophecy*, p. 294.

them entirely from the category of men. Being primarily teachers of their own age, such a view makes God responsible for a method not paralleled by anything we know of Him in other realms. Further, it is to remove a master motive to the service of God and man, seeing that it inevitably shuts us in to a most hopeless and desolating fatalism.

(5) To study, affection, communion, and knowledge, the element of sympathy must be added as a factor in the training of the prophets. They loved God intensely, and, because of that, they loved their fellow-men the more. "For the hurt of the daughter of my people I am hurt,"[1] is the agonizing cry of Jeremiah, and therein he speaks for all the company of the prophets. They suffered for and with their people. They knew their sorrows and carried their burdens.

What makes the personality of the prophet, and the nature of his message and work such a charm, is the thorough humanness running through all. Where, for example, even now, when we are supposed to have advanced so far in our estimate of human values, is there excelled that fine outburst of pure feeling on the part of Jeremiah, as he cries :— "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people"?[2] How else can the Gethsemane of Isaiah be understood,—a scholar, an aristocrat, a statesman,—as, for his people's sake, and to save them from the

[1] Jer. viii. 21. [2] Jer. ix. 1.

threatened Assyrian disaster, "for three years he walked naked and barefoot"?[1] Was it not for love of his people, Amos faced the revelling, immoral crowd of Bethel? And what else but the desire of Hosea to save his people from the consequences of forsaking their God, could have compelled from so pure and sensitive a soul, the unutterably painful story of his own darkened home?

It is by pursuing this line of psychical study, inquiring into the prophet's inner experience, examining the factors making up his mental and moral training, that we are able to understand the prophet as he came to be, and account for the large place he filled in the world of his day.

That these same factors still apply, and are as essential to the effective service of God and man, supplies the reason and defines the purpose of this particular study, and will form the appeal of the later part of our task. Meanwhile, before passing to a closing reference bearing upon the call of the prophets, and as a further tribute to what we have designated their "humanness," it is delightful, in tracing the prophet's development, to mark how each prophet retains his identity, and refuses the "stamp" or "type" of any prescribed mould. They came to the knowledge of their work through their own experience, and the experience was just as varied as life itself. When our Lord selected the twelve for training, in order to the preaching of the Kingdom, He included in that group every type of personality. The twelve

[1] Isa. xx. 3.

are a miniature world, and it is an exquisite study to mark how, without interfering with personality, He moulded their lives to His pattern.

Taking the fifteen canonical prophets—excluding Daniel, as belonging to apocalypse—we find almost every type of personality represented. Returning for a moment to the pre-literary prophets, Elijah is as unlike Elisha, as John the Forerunner of Jesus is unlike John the Apostle. So Amos and Micah are as far removed in social status and in early training from Isaiah and Ezekiel as men could possibly be, yet each is true to himself, each brought his distinctive contribution to the ever-growing whole of truth, and the building of the City of God.

III.

When we pass to the important consideration of the prophet's call—the means by which he is made aware of what we designate vocation—we are still in the realm of psychological study. For the question of call is primarily rooted in subjective experience. It first works in the realm of the inner consciousness. It presupposes a willingness to surrender personality to the higher desires and purposes of God. In this statement, we do not forget the shrinking of Isaiah,[1] the reasoning of Jeremiah,[2] or the sense of insufficiency in Paul.[3]

Who has ever seriously contemplated the work of the prophet, as a speaker for God, the awe of it, the responsibilities it brings, the eternal issues

[1] Isa. vi. 5. [2] Jer. i. 4–10. [3] 2 Cor. ii. 16.

involved, and not felt the humiliating sense of unworthiness and unfitness for a work so great, for a privilege so distinctive? Is it not correct to affirm that the higher the sense of "vocation," the more complete the sense of helplessness on the human side? Yet are not these experiences of disparity and disability rather a ground for the Divine approach than otherwise? Have not the best and as it has proved, the most successful of God's workmen, felt the same? Such legitimate self-distrust is certainly consistent with a secret devotion, a willingness to "obey the heavenly vision," when once the path of duty is clear.

When however, we thus emphasize the subjective, and speak of it as a "primary factor," we do not mean that God is not the author of the call, or that He is not its first cause. Rather what is meant is, that this is the method by which He works, finding deep in the qualities of personality and spiritual loyalty, His path of approach.

The prophets are, each of them, most definite in their claim, that they are commissioned men. The sense of vocation is overpowering. They speak because they have been commanded by Heaven's King. They have distinctly heard God's voice, and hence their dogmatism, "Thus saith the Lord." In all the suffering of Jeremiah—his life a martyrdom—perhaps nothing made him smart more, than the charge of Shemaiah that he was a prophet by his own appointment.[1] His

[1] Jer. xxix. 27.

answer to the cruel insinuation is the passionate assertion of a compelling inward power, leaving him no option. "And if I say, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name, then there is in mine heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I cannot contain."[1]

But, in all this very real work of the Divine Spirit, arresting, compelling, instructing, it is not necessary to suppose then—any more than now—an objective appearance, or audible voice. The experience of Isaiah in the temple,[2] is not the less, but all the more real to us, as we think of the uprush of spiritual feeling, the overmastering sense of God's presence and power which possessed him, as he mused there in profound thought of his people, his nation, the menace of Assyria, and then of God as the only, yet sufficient answer.

The well-known instance of Isaiah may stand for the whole. No more attractive study presents itself—and in these days, when "speakers for God" are urgently needed—no study can be more important, than to follow the way in which these men were led to make their witness. In this respect, the pages of the prophets, as autobiographical revelations, are at once the most illuminating and the most delightful of our literature.

Always remembering the controlling and guiding purpose of God, using, as He has chosen to do, human channels as His organ of communication,

[1] Jer. xx. 9. [2] Isa. vi. 1–9.

while reluctantly passing over the examination of individual instances, let us mark the following elements, as constituting the "call" of the prophet :—

(1) Experience leads the way. God must be known, loved, obeyed. Much will have led to the definite "sense of God," which underlies vocation. What indeed is experience, but the growing force of many rills making up the main current or channel of personality? It is what the New Testament knows as conversion, and the following of Christ. These men knew God, not as a doctrine, but as a fact. As they followed their work, as they looked out over the conditions of their time, or as they suffered in their persons and homes, God stood for them as the reality behind, above, and over all. He and His made up for them the supreme concern of life.

(2) Conviction grew out of their experience. They saw clearly, because their Divine teacher was so real, and because they felt so strongly the reasonableness, the imperiousness of His demand. And the morality for which Yahweh stood, as distinct from the deities of other nations, the prevailing voluptuousness of their times, and the tendency to rest in mere form and ritual, such morality and the need for it, was as real as God Himself. The nation would perish unless it abandoned idolatry, and honoured Yahweh its God. Nothing could save it from extinction but return and loyalty to Him. Hence the "ethical monotheism" of the prophets' message, and, in

that, their distinctive contribution to the development of Israel's religion.

(3) Out of such depth of conviction came the inward compulsion, by which the "call" was confirmed and expressed. Each of them passed through an experience, felt later by the "One greater than a prophet," so that they could have fittingly used His own great speech, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."[1] And it is always questionable, whether, until this "necessity is laid upon us," and the sense of "woe unto me" is felt, we ought to accept any other standard as constituting the call of God.

There were other considerations moving the prophets, as there always are, where these more subjective experiences are shared. The prophets, because they lived in the very real world where God was first and chief, lived and moved also in the equally real world of human need. Emerson in one of his essays, remarks:—"the seer must always be a sayer." But why? Because the keen eye of the seer is always upon life; its conditions, wrongs, perils, problems, baseness, nobleness.

The "cloistered cell" is never the home of prophets. They will sometimes tarry there to commune and to draw supplies of wisdom and strength, but they will as surely emerge from it, having had the "inner vision" of the world's crying need, to bring to men the message of heaven's

[1] Luke xii. 50.

forgiving love. And their confidence in the completeness of the Divine answer, their intimate knowledge of man's need, and their eagerness to make the conditions of human life an opportunity for God, will be for them and for others the confirmation and proof of their call to speak.

To give "an opportunity for God." To the prophet, this is, beyond everything, the "one thing needful." Jealousy for the honour of God, unshakable loyalty to the Divine will, the longing here and now to get that will done, and all, because therein lies the salvation of the individual and the only hope of the world, this constitutes the burden, the life-mission, the growing heaven of those who are the called and trained of God.

CHAPTER III.

The Prophet in Later Israel.

BETWEEN the decisive and splendid victory of Elijah on Carmel, and the Elijah-like appearance of Amos in Bethel, there stretches about a century of thrilling life for Israel, some part of which must now pass under review, if we are to understand the larger place of the prophet in Israel from the eighth century onward, and the permanent contribution he made to the life and religion of his own and succeeding times.

So conspicuous a triumph, and so unanimous a choice as the headland of Carmel witnessed that day when idolatry was exposed, and the people cried out "The Lord he is God; the Lord he is God,"[1] might have been reckoned as final, and as deciding the supremacy of Yahweh for ever.

But the teaching of history, down to our own time, warns us against expecting too much from sudden upheavals of revolution, or from gusts of popular feeling, or the effort to impose reform from without. True religion, indeed, had been greatly assisted by the victory of Elijah, but not only were the people a long way from the purer

[1] 1 Kings xviii. 39.

monotheism of the prophet of the exile,[1] the worship of the old Canaanite Baals still went on, and was even increased, while there set in a season of revelling and riotousness of living, which at length called forth the stern denunciation of Amos, the first of the literary prophets.

We have a parallel in the triumph of Puritanism under Cromwell, and the re-action of the Restoration on the return of Charles the Second. After seven years of civil war, following the awful tyrannies of Laud, Buckingham, and Strafford; the "crowning mercy" of Cromwell's smashing blow at Naseby; the brilliant years of the Commonwealth, with the triumph of liberty they witnessed; there were those in England who hoped for, and declared the near approach of the golden age.

Yet the "reign of the saints" was immediately followed by "the reign of strumpets," and, set free from the stricter rule of the Puritans, the forces of evil were unloosed, and for a time overwhelmed the Puritan triumph, as though it had been in vain.

A later parallel, and, for this generation a more serious one, is found "in the greatest war in history" of the years 1914 to 1919. The war was fought for the overthrow of tyranny, and to make the world safe for democracy. It was believed and hoped that the agony of such a horror would have sobered nations, humbling them before God, and leading to a passionate yearning for a new Pentecost as the solution of all our problems. Yet we are now confronted by a world in which the extremes

[1] Isa. xl. 18–26; xliv. 8–20.

of extravagant waste and pitiful starvation face each other, while every nation has witnessed a recrudescence of riotous pleasure-seeking, a love of sheer brutality, and a general spirit of lawlessness, such as followed the re-establishment of tyranny under the Stuarts.

But to return. Undoubtedly Elijah's reformation, supported by his successor, Elisha, profoundly affected the nation. Yet, imperceptibly no doubt at first, but surely, and with ever-increasing velocity, Israel, retaining the forms of the worship of Yahweh, declined to the lowest moral standards.

Many factors contributed to this downward tendency. Let us examine the chief.

(1) The greater laxity of the prevailing idolatry, with the indulgences they encouraged, was a constant temptation to the sensitive, imitative Semitic mind.

We have only to remember the prevailing worldliness of our own time, and the influence of it upon the crowd, to understand this. The golden calves still remained at the shrines of worship.[1] The "Asherah,"[2] or sacred pole, remained in Samaria. Royal sanctuaries were set up at Bethel, at one end of the kingdom, and Dan[3] at the other. Gilgal, Mizpeh, Tabor, Shechem, and Penuel, while they all testified to the prevailing religiousness of the people, contributed in the end, to the formalizing and corruption of the truer worship of Yahweh.

This was due to the fact that while at these shrines, the Israelites worshipped their own god,

[1] 1 Kings xii. 28. [2] 1 Kings xvi. 33. [3] 1 Kings xii. 29.

Yahweh, the Canaanite worship of their false Baals went on at the same sites. Attached to each rival deity, was a band of zealous priests, each striving to outvie the other in attracting the people. The sacred feasts and services were accompanied by the most shameful excesses.[1] To these feasts, the people were encouraged to bring their material offerings and gifts, often the produce of the land.

And when it is remembered that these shrines of worship were also seats of judgment, and offices of state administration,[2] where law and justice were openly travestied,[3] it is easy to understand how difficult it would be to preserve the purity of religion. When the worship of religion is corrupt, religion itself, for the individual, has been slain!

(2) The settlement in Canaan, and especially the union of the tribes under a monarchy, had meant the growth of towns, the development of industries, and an approach to some of the arts of civilization.

Under David, and following his conquests, and for some time under Solomon, the nation enjoyed a period of remarkable prosperity, during which "Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his own vine and under his fig-tree."[4]

The rich soil, especially of the North—Samaria and Galilee—yielded an abundance far beyond their need, so that riches were stored up, and the "people waxed fat." But side by side with this

[1] Amos ii. 7, 8. Hosea iv. 11–14.
[2] 2 Sam. viii. 15; 1 Kings iii. 28; Amos. vii. 10–13.
[3] Amos ii. 6, 7; viii. 5, 6. [4] 1 Kings iv. 25.

material prosperity, aided by the syncretizing tendency of the worship, morality declined

(3) Ultimately, the monarchy Israel desired, "to make them as other nations," proved its ruin. To understand this, we need to remember that, under David, the old patriarchal nobility remained, and the king was "chief among equals."

But, under Solomon, a change took place which profoundly and permanently affected the life of the people, while it served to create the need and point out the place of the later prophet's work.

Gradually, but surely, government now tended to centre round "courts," calling for an "aristocratic" or "noble" class. Military officers, officers of departments were created and placed in positions of authority and influence, who in turn entirely superseded the older order of heads of families and tribes, while the people were reduced to the conditions of serfdom. And, as has so often happened since, the people—for whom the prophets chiefly cared—were exploited and fleeced by the powerful few.

Extravagance, expansion of territory, ivory palaces for kings and nobles,[1] all meant exaction in the way of taxes. These taxes the old yeoman class were unable to meet, so that more and more the land was seized by the rulers, and the poor, in ever-increasing numbers, became the mere tools of the rich.

This was brought to a head under Solomon, whose borrowing from Hiram had compelled him

[1] Amos iii. 15.

to cede twenty of his northern cities to the Phœnician. From being the idol, Solomon was now regarded as the oppressor of his people, so that by the time his son Rehoboam came to the throne, events were ripe for revolution. That revolution was hastened by the declaration of avowed tyranny on the part of the new king,[1] only Judah and Benjamin remaining loyal to the ancient house of David.

As indicating the nature and strength of the change already referred to, the remaining ten tribes of the North, instead of selecting a king of the old patriarchal type, called back from Egypt, an old favourite, but disgraced official of Solomon,[2] idolatrous, tyrannical, despotic. Dynasty followed dynasty in rapid succession, each new monarch mounting upon the slaughter of the supporters of his forerunner.

This went on, until the long and prosperous, but wicked rule of Jeroboam II, whose military successes in Syria and Damascus, accompanied by a revival of the extravagance of Solomon's worst days, in still further weakening the moral fibre of the nation, called forth the prophetic judgment of Amos.

(4) Nor, in estimating the position of affairs in later Israel, can we afford to overlook the critical geographical situation, particularly of the Northern Kingdom. Judah, away behind her rocky bulwarks, and with her far less favoured soil, difficult also of access, was saved many of the perils of the neighbouring kingdom of Israel. This serves partly to

[1] 1 Kings xii. 11. [2] 1 Kings xi. 40.

explain why Judah remained longer in attachment to the old faith, though the tendencies which characterized and changed the northern portion of the kingdom, were true also of the south.

Galilee, open to the Mediterranean—the marriage-ring of nations—with its broad, inviting Esdraelon plain running under Nazareth—an open gateway between East and West—made Northern Israel, "a buffer state," between Assyria or Babylon, and Egypt, Ethiopia, or Rome, as the case may be.

(5) This rendered the Northern Kingdom more sensitive to the restlessness, the aggressiveness and lust of empire, which is so marked a feature of the Eighth Century B.C. And it inevitably constituted part of the moral temptation of Israel, to be even as the nations whose greatness so impressed them. "By far the greatest event in the eighth century before Christ was the appearance of Assyria in Palestine."[1] And this remarkable play of internationalism, the fact that the Hebrews were being "drawn into the world," that they felt movements of which their own history was but an eddy, gave the prophets of Israel their opportunity, and assisted them to reach and proclaim that view of God, which, while destroying the nation, saved the world for true religion.

I.

These contributing factors, while powerfully affecting the life of the nation, served to release the prophet for his true work as "the mouthpiece

[1] Sir G. A. Smith, *Book of the Twelve Prophets*, vol. i. p. 44.

of God," and as the revealer of the Divine mind. In earlier days, as we have seen, the "seer" was the general adviser, the referee in disputes, what we should now describe as the political leader or statesman, the "power behind the throne" in a political sense.

But as the monarchy in Israel became more and more an imitation of oriental royalty, monopolizing all leadership within its own court and military circles, the prophets, released from "secular" obligations, increasingly represented the moral passion and became the moral voice of the nation. Political independence heightened their religious authority. They counted for far more as moral teachers, than as judges of petty disputes, or such relatively small questions as deciding the direction of straying cattle.[1] They grew to a position of greater trust and wider leadership, as they proved themselves the impartial critics, and the safest guides of the nation's life.

The appeal of Amos is directly to the people. The prophets become the educators of the common conscience. They are emphatically "the preachers of righteousness" to every class of the community —the court included—and righteousness, right relations to God, right conduct toward their fellow-man, is their chief concern.

Questions of ritual, of worship, or of political alliances may then take care of themselves. "But let judgment roll down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream."[2] This is the refrain of the

[1] 1 Sam. ix. 6. [2] Amos v. 24.

prophetic music, old indeed as music itself, but now repeated by Amos and Hosea with an intensity, a passion, and in such varied and noble setting, as led on to the "golden age" of prophecy under Isaiah and Jeremiah, and, great as any, the eloquent second Isaiah.

What is important to note here, as proving the Divine guidance and government of the world, is the striking fact that the rise of internationalism in the eighth century before Christ, the clash of great empires, found great moral leaders in Israel and Judah, such as no other nation possessed.

Just when they were needed, these prophetic leaders were there, prepared to step outside national boundaries, ready to take the international, the world view. They were eager to make their broad appeal to the innate moral consciousness of man everywhere, to touch universal chords, and so create music, the power and beauty of which has become the imperishable and priceless possession of universal man. In this respect, the contribution of the Hebrew prophet is unique. In the history of the religions of the world, there is nothing like it.

II.

It does not fall within our province to follow the swaying fortunes of Israel and Judah under the successive invasions of foreign peoples. Nor do we stay to describe how the struggle resulted first of all, as might have been expected, in the over-

throw of the Northern Kingdom, the fall of Samaria under the Assyrians in 722 B.C.; then later, in the fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of Judah under the Babylonians, in 568 B.C. We are here concerned with these exciting and tragic years, as we mark across them the faithful ministry, the heroic witness and suffering, the unflinching devotion of the prophets.

It is an altogether thrilling story, so perennially interesting that it is so human. A record full of warning, rebuke, encouragement and hope to our own time, particularly as the resemblances are so numerous and accurate.

Writing as we do, with the modern ministry of the Word in view, and supremely concerned for the place and power of the modern pulpit, we are profoundly convinced—especially in view of the enormous gains brought to the study of the prophets by modern scholarship—that they offer to the preachers of to-day, and to their congregations, an untold mine of wealth.

That through these successive generations God raised up and called these speakers and sufferers, "daily rising up early"[1] (a significant indication of eagerness, not without its modern application), leaving no age, however corrupt, without those who would have saved disaster, is a wondrous revelation of "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God,"[2] which later compelled Paul to break out in profoundest adoration.

[1] Jer. vii. 25. [2] Rom. xi. 33.

That there were men prepared to respond, men who, like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, loving their people dearly, were willing to face the unwelcome tasks of rebuke and judgment, and risk life itself for the sake of loyalty to their Divine ideal, is a tribute to the greatness of human nature, and a striking confirmation of Paul's statement, that God has never "left himself without witness."[1]

That notwithstanding the expenditure of such a true wealth and royalty of nature as these outstanding personalities represented—the really great of the earth—they were rejected and cast out, the world "not being worthy of them;"[2] that might and wickedness wrought out its repeated and apparently triumphant mischief, is but a striking illustration of the course of history, from the beginning to this day, and constitutes the travail, delay, and mystery of succeeding ages.

That through the sacrifice and labour of these truly royal men, the cause of pure religion ultimately won through, and that, through this saved remnant, came "The One," whom we reverently worship as Master and Lord, whose Kingdom is everlasting and whose triumph is as certain as His throne, constitutes the perpetual hope and assurance of faith, while it serves as the abiding challenge to our unflinching loyalty and devotion.

III.

It remains now to trace the way in which the influence and work of the prophets so powerfully

[1] Acts xiv. 17. [2] Heb. xi. 38.

affected the life and history of Judah and Israel during the eventful centuries stretching between Amos, the first of the prophets to commit his words to writing, and Ezekiel, when prophecy was taking on an apocalyptic colouring, including the writers of the exilic and post-exilic periods, conspicuous amongst these, being that unmatched religious genius, the second Isaiah.

As one passes from prophet to prophet, and reads again words that still "live and burn," we are conscious of being caught up into the current of mighty world-movements. We are no longer viewing an insignificant and negligible people, away in one of the smallest of lands, insular, local, self-contained. "Drawn into the world" indeed, as the Hebrews were—the Belgium of the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries before Christ—they lived in the face of some of the greatest empires the world has known, and they became in turn, the aim of their greed, the tools of their might, the victims of their cruelty.

Assyria, always aggressive and violent, under the mighty Tilgath-Pileser IV. (the contemporary of Jeroboam II. and Ahaz) rose to her zenith of power. By successive strokes, regaining Babylonia, attacking the Chaldeans and the Medes—though unsuccessfully—then coming West, taking Damascus and making Palestine a tributary kingdom, her great objective was Egypt, which was gained in 661, and, for ten years, Egypt remained an Assyrian province.

But kingdoms founded on force can have no

permanence, and in a little over fifty years, the Assyrian dynasty was overthrown. Confronted by the revolt of Egypt, attacked by the Scythians, a wild and barbarous people north of the Crimea, they received the final blow from the Medes, and Nahum, the prophet of the period, reflects the general feeling of relief in the overthrow and fall of their capital, Nineveh :—

> " Ah, how do thy shepherds slumber,
> Thy nobles sleep !
> Thy people are strewn o'er the mountains,
> And no one to gather them !
>
> " All they that hear thy tidings
> Clap hands over thee ;
> For on whom hath not thy villainy
> Passed without ceasing ? "[1]

The Assyrian Empire was now divided between the Medes and the Babylonians. Once more Syria and Palestine became the objective of Egypt on the one side, and, Babylonia on the other. Necho, of Egypt, who had defeated Judah at Megiddo,[2] was overthrown; and under Nebuchadrezzar the Crown Prince of Babylon, Palestine became a part of the Babylonian Empire. The revolt of Jehoiakim led to a first deportation into captivity in 597. Again the Egyptians under Hophra fought for Syria and Palestine, which resulted in the movement of Nebuchadrezzar westward, and the capture and fall of Jerusalem in 586. A witness of these horrors, a captive and exile, one of the most gifted of Israel's sons, has vividly mirrored

[1] Nahum iii. 18, 19. Quoted from Prof. A. R. Gordon's, *The Prophets of the Old Testament*, pp. 174, 175.
[2] 2 Kings xxiii. 29.

the scene in what he calls "a lamentation," and shall be for a lamentation[1] :—

"A strong branch she had,—
A sceptre of rulers;
High was its growth 'mid the foliage,
And stately with many a shoot.

"She was plucked up in fury,
She was thrown to the ground;
The East wind parched her fruit,
Tore off her shoots.

"Her strong branch withered away,
The fire devoured it;
And now she is planted in desert ground,
In a parched land.

"And fire hath gone out from her branch,
And consumed her shoots;
And her strong branch abideth no more
As a sceptre for rule."[2]

What is known as the Persian period began in 539 under Cyrus, King of Persia, who came up against Belshazzar at Opis, and afterwards entered Babylon without opposition. To this period we owe the "great prophet" of the later years of the exile, as also Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

This rapid and imperfect sketch of the external history of Israel and Judah is included here, that we may the more truly estimate the greatness of the prophets, called at such a crisis to the moral leadership of the nation. So far as outward magnificence goes, and, reckoned by mere material standards, it was one of the greatest periods of universal history. For, on either side of this small

[1] Ezek. xix. 10–14.

[2] Quoted from Prof. A. R. Gordon's *The Prophets of the Old Testament*, p. 226.

"buffer state," the great empires of that day were contending for mastery, regardless of the rights of smaller peoples, and utterly unscrupulous in method. Our recent experiences during the late world-war present perhaps the closest parallel.

But God leaves not the world without witness. As, out of the dark days of the Stuart tyranny, there shines the witness of our glorious Milton,

"Whose soul was like a star, and dwelt apart,"

so out of these suffering years of Israel's life, came these patriotic, lofty, pure-minded prophets, towering to a sweep of vision, to a courage and strength unequalled in history. And what an assuring and impressive reflection—as proving the abiding supremacy of the spiritual over the material—that while all these masterful empires have vanished, and their haughty monarchs are forgotten, the prophets they ignored or despised, are beloved leaders still, and their neglected speech is prized as part of our choicest literary and spiritual possession.

IV.

In our next chapter we shall attempt to ascertain something as to the substance of their teaching. Only so can we rightly and adequately understand either the men, or the debt we owe them.

Meanwhile, there are certain characteristics of their message and work requiring statement, especially as it relates to the abiding ministry of the preacher. In point of attainment, outlook, and grasp, they are as unlike each other as any

similar group of preachers to-day, or indeed, in any day.

Accepting the considered judgment of Cornill, that "Amos is one of the most marvellous and incomprehensible figures in the history of the human mind, the pioneer of a process of evolution from which a new epoch of humanity dates,"[1] no one would contend that his ministry in Israel, is to be compared with the long and brilliant ministry of Isaiah in the Judean capital. Or that the work of Hosea and Micah of the same Assyrian period, ranks with the work of the outstanding prophets of the Babylonian era, men like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who sustained and guided the nation through the terrible years of the final break-up and dispersion.

Nor does this estimate imply either disparagement or inferiority. It is much more a tribute to the sincerity and devotion of each individual prophet. It is beyond all, a tribute to the wisdom and goodness of God, "who hath distributed to each man, as God hath called each,"[2] and whose eternal thought and mercy has the whole of humanity within His embrace. Their variety is their charm, even as loyalty to their own individuality is at once their credential and their power.

What is so delightful, as we read them to-day, is to discover their point of unity in their passionate loyalty to their God. That, differing in tempera-

[1] Cornill: *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 46.
[2] 1 Cor. vii. 17; Rom. xii. 3.

ment, in the nature of their "call," in the form of their message, they are yet one in their sense of the Divine pressure and burden. This will be the more apparent, as we examine the individual features of their work.

(1) The ministry of Amos is characterized by the distinctive notes of warning and judgment. He has been described as a "dogmatist of the reality of conscience and the God of conscience."[1] He breaks in upon Israel's wickedness entirely unannounced and unknown, yet he speaks with such directness to the conscience of the revellers at Bethel, and with such authority, as to suggest the rank of the prophet. This explains why Amaziah immediately links him with the prophet class, bidding him to return to his own land, and prophesy there.[2]

The training of Amos had well equipped him for his work. Away among his native hills of Tekoa, he had lived in close and constant communion with God. He had thus gained a knowledge of the moral order of the world, and of God's relation thereto, as to fit him to become "the pioneer of a new epoch." As a shepherd and a dresser of sycomores,[3] he knew and understood nature as God's oldest book of reality and truth. How well he knew it is seen in the apt and forceful use he makes of nature to illustrate and enforce his message.[4] There it was, that knowing his work

[1] Dr. A. C. Welch, *Religion of Israel*, p. 76.
[2] Amos vii. 10-13. [3] Amos vii. 14.
[4] Amos iii. 4, 5, 8; viii. 1–2.

and loving it, loving God most of all, he received his call.

Away in his country home, he saw and felt the need of men. He knew what was taking place in the world outside Israel. He grieved over the corrupt conditions of his own people. He saw how religion itself was being used to encourage a shocking defiance of moral law.[1] He mused upon it until his great soul flamed with indignation, he felt "necessity was laid upon him," a call he could not refuse urged him, saying, "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."[2] "The Lord God has spoken, who can but prophesy."[3]

It was God who was hurt and offended by their sin. And not only theirs, but by sin anywhere and everywhere. God cannot endure it, either in Israel, or outside Israel. It is an offence to Him. And it must cease, or judgment and penalty must follow.

How this led Amos forward to his great doctrine of God, must be considered later. Certainly this firm grasp of a great, a world-embracing moral order, applying to Israel because it applied to other nations, but particularly to Israel, seeing that they had received so much of Yahweh's favour, serves as an explanation of the prophet's vehemence and severity.

It is quite clear that Amos the herdman is no provincial. Nor is he a surface reader of local or national weaknesses and follies. He rises to heights

[1] Amos v. 10–13; vi. 3–6; viii. 4–7.
[2] Amos vii. 15. [3] Amos iii. 8.

of true grandeur, because he has been captivated by a great view of God, and of that righteousness, which, being of God, is supreme and eternal.

Nor, let us add, can any ministry be worthily sustained, or made permanently effective, where the sovereignty of God, the greatness of conscience, and the peril of grieving the one, or ignoring the other, is not an oft-recurring note.

(2) Hosea was the late contemporary, and immediate successor of Amos. As a native of the Northern Kingdom, he may probably have listened to the denunciation of Amos, when he thundered forth his warning at Bethel, and was silenced by Amaziah.

Nor is it mere idle fancy to suggest that, as one among the crowd, the courage and conviction of Amos may have been a factor in his own awakening and call. While every syllable Amos uttered, rang with the note of deep conviction, he spoke with the detachment belonging to one not directly involved in the suffering and ruin he threatens and predicts.

On the other hand, as a countryman and fellow-citizen, the message of Hosea throbs with the personal note; his soul is wrung with anguish by the wrong-doing of his people, and the suffering he too regards as inevitable.

His is therefore the ministry of entreaty, of repentance, of proffered mercy and affection.[1] Hosea is the complement of Amos, in that he supplies the "wooing note." "His voice" says

[1] Hosea xiv. 2–4.

Prof. A. B. Davidson, "when addressing his countrymen, is always choked with emotion. His speech is little else than a succession of sobs. He behaves before the wickedness and inevitable doom of his countrymen, with the extravagance of a distracted mourner in the presence of his dead."[1]

A man of profound sympathy and feeling, keenly sensitive, passionately loyal to his God, a true patriot, it was the agony of Hosea that he lived through the awful years following the strong rule of Jeroboam II., when the throne rested in blood, and nobles, judges, and people, descended from one villainy to another. He saw the Assyrian peril drawing ever nearer. And there is no wonder, that such an experience, breaking in upon such a nature, was to him "the word of the Lord,"[2] leaving him no option but to obey.

But there is an experience deeper than all this, more personal and therefore more bitter, out of which Hosea reaches the consciousness of his mission, and particularly his lofty teaching of Yahweh's relation to Israel. It was his affliction that he had known the greatest sorrow man can ever know—short of personal shame—the shame of a disgraced and shattered home, brought about by the oft-forgiven, yet oft-repeated unfaithfulness of the woman he still intensely loved.

That his wife was pure and loyal when he married, and that the statement of Hosea i. 2, is the record of later knowledge, surely requires no proof here

[1] *Expositor:* 1st Series, vol. ix. p. 246.
[2] Hosea i. 1.

It is referred to in the text as explaining the nature of Hosea's prophetic work, in seeking to interpret Israel's relation to God. To make God the author of a command to marry a profligate woman, or to suggest that Hosea is later professing a shame he could not have felt, if his love was fixed on one unworthy from the first, is trifling alike with God and His prophet. Hosea's love is indeed wonderful. For not once, nor twice, but often he entreats his wife, and restores her. He is betrayed and flouted again, and again his love seeks her out, and brings her back.

Even so had Israel treated Yahweh! The infidelity had stretched across the centuries, and was flagrant and shocking. Yet Yahweh had as often cried out, "How shall I give thee up?"[1] Surely here was a love infinitely beyond the love of Hosea for his poor, misguided, sinning wife! A love unspeakable, seeing the treachery had been so persistent and colossal, and that the greatness of the love rejected had been on so large a scale!

"When we consider that all this was absolutely new, that those thoughts in which humanity has been educated, and which have consoled it for nearly three thousand years, were first spoken by Hosea, we must reckon him among the greatest religious geniuses whom the world has ever produced."[2]

This accounts for, and enables us to interpret, the characteristics of Hosea's ministry. The

[1] Hosea xi. 8.
[2] Cornill: *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 50.

prophet who was the first to use the term "love,"[1] in defining God's relation to man, and man's possible relation to God; who made this fact the ground of his entreaty to his countrymen; the reason for their repentance and return; the refrain of all his offer of Divine mercy; such a man must always be the companion, and the closely studied pattern of those, whose glorious vocation it is to reveal the heart of the eternal.

(3) Isaiah and Micah were contemporary prophets of Judah. Differing widely in circumstance, in attainment, and in statement, yet they are alike in their insistence upon the ethical and intensely practical demands of religion.

Isaiah is the aristocrat, the polished and accomplished statesman. Of noble birth and high attainment, he is the pattern of how position and great ability can be consecrated to the service of God and man.

Micah is the democrat, the lowly countryman, and the man of the people. Yet in his passionate loyalty to God, in his pure spirituality, his hatred of sham and pretence, he takes rank with the greatest of the prophets. In estimating Micah, we cannot forget that he is overshadowed by the long and brilliant ministry of Isaiah in the capital, even as the very able men in Gladstone's cabinets, were overshadowed by the outstanding greatness of his unrivalled genius.

Yet it is due to Micah to say, that the requirements of practical godliness have never been more

[1] Hosea xi. 1, xiv. 4.

finely summed up, than in the words which even yet are conspicuous, as a classical definition of our religion :—" He hath showed thee, O man, what is good ; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."[1]

While Hosea sets forth the tenderness and love of Yahweh, Isaiah, true to the nature of his solemn call,[2] always urges the greatness, the holiness, the unsullied honour of Yahweh, upon his people. But Isaiah always moves in a lofty realm of thought and practice. And his wonderful public ministry, lasting over forty years in that small capital, led to and formed, the " golden age " of prophecy. With the death of Uzziah in 740 B.C. and with Israel tottering to its fall—passing out from the history entirely in 722 B.C. by the overthrow of Samaria, and the captivity—Judah now became the sole centre of prophetic interest and activity.

Geographically, as we have seen, Judah lay off the world tracks of conquest, and, away behind the fastnesses of her ring of hills, barren in material resource, and difficult of access, was largely negligible and unimportant. The probabilities are, that the growing pride and aggressiveness of Assyria, aiming far higher, would have left Judah in peace, with the payment of a yearly tribute, had not her ambitious and foolish king, with their puppet advisers, invited attack.

As it was, the real burden and responsibility of leadership fell upon Isaiah. Nor, with the solitary

[1] Micah vi. 8. [2] Isa. vi. 1—8.

exception and parallel of Jeremiah, does history offer any finer picture than that of this lofty, gifted patriot and prophet, standing alone for full forty years against people, priests, statesmen, and monarchs, insisting upon the supreme claims of righteousness, and urging the surer, safer ways of quiet reliance upon their God.[1]

Nor does any history offer a finer illustration of the triumph of moral and spiritual appeal over material might and rebellion, than the complete vindication of Isaiah's witness, in the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem.[2] In the hour of Judah's deepest darkness and lowest humiliation, the triumph of faith, and the righteousness which counselled loyalty to God, shone with a glory even yet undimmed.

(4) With the death of Hezekiah, and the accession of his wicked son, Manasseh, a fierce and violent hatred of the prophets set in, with a terrible reaction in favour of the worst forms of paganism. Even the king made his firstborn son to pass through the fire in sacrifice to Moloch, and lawlessness and debauchery swept over the land as a devastating flood.

Surely—the people argued—the gods ruling Assyria must be mightier than all other deities, or Assyria could not have become so powerful, nor her generals so great in conquest. Notwithstanding all that Isaiah had said, might must be right, and so, for a time, idolatry ran riot. Prophecy was silenced, but at length, as Assyria, threatened by

[1] Isa. xxx. 15. [2] Isa. xxxvii. 32–37.

the onrush of the Scythian power, gave signs of breaking up, Zephaniah, a disciple of Isaiah, thunders forth his prophecy of judgment, and announces his doctrine of "the day of the Lord." "Yahweh is righteous in the midst of her; morning by morning he brings his justice to light."[1]

As the great-great-grandson of Hezekiah,[2] of royal rank therefore, and with everything to lose on the material side by associating himself with the now bitterly hated prophetic order and with the true religion, his fearless witness is a splendid tribute to the abiding worth, and the enormous influence of Isaiah's life-work. Zephaniah is a conspicuous example of the intense loyalty our religion inspires in others, loyalty to a human master, and, much more, to his master's God. Alike the man and his prophecy—and this is its permanent value—are possessed with the supreme place of God. Everything that matters for him is, that life itself, and all that it stands for, makes up "God's Day," that ultimately, God's authority will be unchallenged and final.

Against the blatant materialism of our own time, and the callous indifference to spiritual appeal which is the sorrow and burden of the modern Christian, the confidence and witness of Zephaniah, is at once an inspiration and a pattern.

(5) Jeremiah stands next in the line of prophets, and is one of God's choicest gifts either to his own, or to any succeeding time. Naturally diffident,

[1] Zephan. iii. 5. [2] Zephan. i. 1.

retiring,[1] and extremely sensitive, he takes rank among the greatest of them all. It was his sorrow that he was called to witness and share the most critical and terrible days of his nation's life. Yet, true patriot as he was, his keen sense of loyalty to God, his recognition of the truth that where patriotism and righteousness come into conflict, patriotism must give way, compelled him to pass judgment upon his nation as utterly unworthy, because of persistent disloyalty to Yahweh, and finally, to witness her break-up and overthrow by a foreign power.

Called to the prophetic office in the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (627 or 626 B.C.) his ministry, like Isaiah's, stretched over the next forty troubled years, during which he saw five kings ascend the throne, his land and capital attacked, pillaged, and destroyed, ending in his own cruel captivity in Egypt, and the deportation of his fellow countrymen to Babylon.

As Hosea, with whom in spirit and in outlook he had most in common, saw Israel pass to her ruin, so Jeremiah lived and suffered during the years when Judah, Pharaoh-like, hardening her heart and bent upon her own way, was wilfully inviting her own destruction.

A lover of peace, companionable, responsive to kindness, warm-hearted and affectionate, Jeremiah's life was one continued sacrifice. Denied the dearest human loves,[2] often forsaken by his friends and misjudged, by reason of a devotion to God

[1] Jer. i. 6. [2] Jer. xvi. 2.

they were unable to reconcile with patriotism, Jeremiah was being constantly driven back upon himself and his personal friendship with God.

This enables us to understand how he reached a level of spirituality hitherto unapproached, so that, beyond any of his predecessors, he is the prophet of the spiritual, the herald of the "new covenant,"[1]—the law of God written in the heart—and the teacher of individual worth and responsibility.[2]

The high tribute of Dr. Peake in his valuable commentary on Jeremiah must be reproduced here, alike for its essential truth, as for its noble statement:—"He was the first to break through the crust of nationalism to the glowing centre of religion. And he who first proclaimed the truth that religion is in its essence the communion of the individual with God, must for ever rank as one of the world's supreme discoverers in the greatest of all realms."[3]

(6) Both Nahum and Habakkuk lived through the period now under review, Habakkuk being the later of the two, and stretching over into the exile. Both have as their theme the overthrow of the tyrant Assyrian power. Both are prophets of judgment and doom, though, as we shall see, Habakkuk rises to moral heights, and concerns himself with moral issues, not to be found in his earlier contemporary.

A passionate love of God, and an intense hatred and even scorn of the folly that sets itself against

[1] Jer. xxxi. 33. [2] Jer. xxxi. 29–30.
[3] *Jeremiah*, vol. i. p. 48 (Century Bible Series).

Him are characteristic qualities of their fiery speech. Nahum felt, as we ought still to feel, that when wickedness lifts itself in pride against the eternal righteousness, and even boasts of its power to do mischief, it must be met with unsparing condemnation. Alike the authority of God, and the rights of our common humanity demand it. The essential and permanent value of Nahum's patriotism, roots itself in a humanitarianism, which makes him, in a special sense, the prophet of humanity.

Habakkuk, of whom personally, we know little, becomes to us the greater, the more he is examined. He believes in God intensely. Before he had uttered his outstanding message, "The just shall live by his faithfulness,"[1] he had proved its truth, and had reached it by an experience born of struggle and deep anguish of spirit. That anguish had been occasioned by the moral disorder he saw everywhere. Dr. Peake argues in the Commentary already referred to, that it is in Jeremiah[2] we probably find the first expression in Hebrew literature of the problem, Why do the wicked prosper?[3] It is impossible to resist the force of his reasoning. Yet, it is a tribute to the greatness of the later prophet that Habakkuk also takes his problem into the secret presence of the Eternal, and dares to ask questions of God Himself.[4]

Habakkuk the questioner, the man who wrestles with the abiding moral problems of the world, has an intense interest for all who are still per-

[1] Hab. ii. 4. [2] Jer. xii. 1–6.
[3] *Jeremiah*, vol. i. pp. 184, 185. [4] Hab. i. 3, 12, 13.

plexed with the mysteries of wrong and pain. But it is Habakkuk the believer, who remains for us both pattern and teacher. He refuses to be baffled by the mystery he is unable to solve. He meets doubt, as must every honest inquirer. But he triumphs over it. And in his triumph of faith,[1] he most nearly anticipates one of the greatest utterances of the New Testament, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith."[2]

(7) It is an exceedingly interesting reflection, that the period of the exile, which, to a superficial observer of the time, must have meant the final ruin of Judah as a nation, is conspicuous for a type of prophetic ministry and service lifting it to a level of greatness hitherto unapproached.

How often the most exquisite experience of rapture, and the clearest vision of truth, has been the gift of the keenest disappointment and sorrow! It was even so for the people of the exile. The overthrow of the nation saved the cause of true religion for the world. What an object-lesson in all that the prophets had striven to teach, was the fact, that away in Babylon, under heathen oppressors, God still cared for them, and was sending to them prophets of comfort and guidance!

Their difficulty and their undoing had been their refusal to denationalize Yahweh, thinking of Him only and serving Him as one among other gods, confined to Palestine as His adopted home. Yet here He was in Babylon, and, notwithstanding

[1] Hab. ii. 14. [2] 1 John v. 4.

the folly which had ended in their ruin, they were still precious in His sight!

So the new Judaism of the Restoration was being trained for the honour of bringing in the one truly universal religion. And in this work of renewal, the prophets of the exile and the return "prepared the way of the Lord."

While the pre-exilic prophets are largely occupied with the ministry of warning, reproof, judgment, and impending doom, the exilic and post-exilic prophets are mainly concerned with the ministry of comfort and hope, of restoration and renewal. In this ministry Ezekiel, and the second Isaiah, are the chief. Haggai, Zechariah, and later, Malachi are the spiritual leaders of the return, heartening the exiles as they face the ruin of the old land to begin the rebuilding of the wastes.

Remembering the immense importance of the exilic and post-exilic contribution to the growing whole of truth, we waive for the present any reference either to the characteristic features of its teaching, or to the teaching itself. It will properly fall into its place in the next chapter. We have earlier referred to the fact,[1] that by the time of the exile, prophecy was taking on some features of apocalyptic. While the origin of this change is generally traced to Zephaniah, and finds its full expression in the Book of Daniel—"our sole example in the Old Testament of an apocalypse in the full sense of the term,"[2]—yet we find indica-

[1] See p. 55.
[2] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 48.

tions of it in Ezekiel, and in the Books of Joel and Obadiah.

A striking instance of apocalyptic is to be found in Isaiah, chapters xxiv.-xxvii. which, in the generally-accepted view of scholars, is certainly post-exilic, and "should be placed in the late Persian period at the earliest."[1] The thought is so advanced and the apocalyptic character is so marked that it can hardly be earlier than the fourth century. There are points of contact with Isaiah's teaching in these chapters, but that is true of later prophets also. In style, in language, in theme, it is utterly unlike Isaiah.

(8) Modern scholars place Joel, formerly regarded as one of the earliest, among the post-exilic prophets. And for the reason already assigned: —that it is partly apocalyptic in style, and that there is no mention in it of Israel as a separate kingdom. God's people are scattered among the nations, and the land is parted.[2] The small community in and around Jerusalem,[3] indicates the period following the return. Yet in its insistence upon the Divine right in man, the certainty of Divine rule, and the finality of the Divine judgment, the Book of Joel is invaluable for the modern preacher.

(9) Obadiah, the smallest of our Old Testament books, is, according to Wellhausen, whose view has been accepted by several scholars,[4] the revision of an older prophecy concerning Edom, already

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 453.
[2] Joel iii. 2. [3] Joel iii. 17.
[4] Dr. Peake's *Jeremiah*, vol. ii. pp. 242, 243.

known to Jeremiah.[1] Here again, the call is to courage and endurance in the face of powerful enemies, and a passionate assurance of the ultimate victory of Yahweh.

Edom, strong in her rocky fastnesses, saying in her pride, "Who shall bring me down to the ground,"[2] has hissed at Judah, and jeered over her downfall.[3] But God's judgment draws on, and the proud shall be brought low.[4] How modern is the picture! And what material is here for the preacher, as he enforces the pride of mere external strength, and its short-lived glory!

(10) The Book of Jonah is the Old Testament missionary classic, one of the best missionary manuals we still possess, and as narrative and literature, forms a perfect gem. Cornill declared that he had read it at least a hundred times; that he "could not even now take up this marvellous book, nay, nor even speak of it, without the tears rising to my eyes, and my heart beating higher."[5] As an unfolding of the Divine regard for man, as a revelation of the method by which God sought to liberalize the Jewish mind and educate it to the world-view, the universal view, it is unmatched for beauty. "To the author Jonah embodies the temper of Israel against which the book is a protest, and it is perhaps simplest to take his narrative as a parable in which Jonah stands for Israel."[6]

[1] Obad. 16; Jer. xxv. 27, 28.
[2] Obad. 3. [3] Obad. 11, 14. [4] Obad. 15.
[5] Cornill, *The Prophets of Israel*, p. 170.
[6] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 556.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire, to a devout Jew, was the embodiment of wickedness, deserving only the rod of swift destruction. In the reluctance of Jonah, the writer strikingly sets forth the difficulty and the unwillingness of the devout Jew, even to think of the idea of repentance and salvation for such a cesspool of corruption. And we mark with growing admiration and wonder, the consummate skill of the writer, as he goes on to show, how, through the pity and sorrow of Jonah for the friendly, yet almost worthless gourd which had given him shelter, he was brought to estimate the pity and sorrow of God for the thousands of precious lives in Nineveh, wicked, yet so tenderly loved!

Surely the whole story, with its happy corrective of Jonah's narrow nationalism, and his subsequent obedience to the Divine command, renders the book one of the most precious and wonderful in literature. Here again we venture to quote the conclusion of Dr. Peake:—"The author stands beyond question among the greatest of the prophets, by the side of Jeremiah and the second Isaiah. That out of the stony heart of Judaism such a book should come is nothing less than a marvel of Divine grace."[1]

(11) The Book of Daniel belongs to the Greek period of history, which began for Palestine in 331 B.C. when it was conquered by Alexander the Great. It was written to encourage and sustain the loyalty of the Jews in their life and death

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 558.

struggle with Hellenism. This reached its climax in 168 B.C. when Antiochus Epiphanes attacked Jerusalem, ruthlessly turning the Temple into a temple of Zeus, actually offering swine's flesh upon its holy altar! Establishing Jerusalem as a Greek city, he at once made all Jewish observances, including the rite of circumcision and the keeping of the Sabbath, to be crimes punishable by death. This caused the Maccabean revolt, and a time of terrible persecution and suffering followed.

Though in the Jewish canon this book was not reckoned among the prophetic writings, nor is even mentioned in Jewish literature before the second century B.C., and while it nowhere claims to be written by Daniel, it is the work of a great religious genius.

Making the hero of the book a Jewish exile in Babylon, the writer uses the story to strengthen the sufferers of that terrible time. He urges upon his countrymen loyalty to their God, and holds out to them the assurance of an everlasting Kingdom of righteousness and truth, which shall bring to naught every rival power, and fill the earth with its glory.

Its intrinsic and permanent value for teaching, its powerful appeal for fidelity, its unconquerable faith in the ultimate triumph of God's purposes, secured its place in our prophetic literature, and gives it a high and permanent value for the Christian teacher.

Looking back over the long stretch of history we have sought to cover in this chapter, we may

at least claim complete justification for the statement, that the prophets, in warning and guiding the nation to which they belonged, saved the cause of true religion for the world.

As we contemplate their genius, their fidelity, their courage, loyalty, and devotion; as we recall their value to their own age, and their permanent place as among the great teachers of the world, we can only fall in adoring wonder and thankfulness before the God they so intensely loved. Thankful most of all that through them He so revealed Himself and His purpose of eternal redemption, as by their ministry, to prepare the way for that greatest gift of all, the final revelation of His unchanging love in the life and death of His Son.

CHAPTER IV.

The Prophetic Contribution to Revelation.

IT is only when we pass to consider our debt to the prophets as revealers of truth, that we can fairly estimate their value, or attempt to measure their importance, not only as teachers to their own times and peoples, but to all the generations following. Here it is they stand as among God's choicest gifts to universal man.

We have only to contrast them with their contemporary "professional" prophets, belonging to the royal courts of Israel and Judah, who prophesied "peace, peace, when there was no peace,"[1] or with the "soothsayers" and "wise men" of heathen courts, who generally echoed what they knew their masters desired them to say, in order to realize how truly these men were raised up by God as His "spokesmen," and that they spoke and wrote under the inspiring guidance of the Holy Spirit of God.

If—as we always must—we except the greatest revelation of God in the Person and Teaching of Jesus, it is questionable whether history provides

[1] Jer. vi. 14, viii. 11.; 1 Kings xxii. 6.

a parallel to the almost visible disclosure of the Divine control of events, and to the intentions of the Divine mind, such as is supplied in the gift and ministry of the Hebrew prophet. In the transition of Israel from the nomadic stage to the life of settlement and growth in Canaan; during the critical years of the early monarchy, and still more under the later monarchy; during and immediately after the exile, it is difficult (humanly speaking) to see, how the nation could have escaped final extinction and forgetfulness, had it not been for the ministry of restraint, of guidance, of moral reinforcement and leadership, supplied by the men who did not shun to declare to their people "the whole counsel of God," as it was revealed to them.

It is necessary to lay stress upon this, because now, as then, it is the fashion and habit of men to discount the value of the teacher, and to exalt the necessity and importance of the "practical" man, the man of affairs, of business, and mechanics.

Even in relation to one of the eminence and rank of Isaiah, the prudential counsels of statesmen were deemed of greater value, than the advice and warnings of the prophet. Yet surely, the barest reflection should enable men to see, that in relation to any and every realm, the "practical" man depends upon the "truth" of things, and the "truth" is brought into the realm of practical life by the one who sees. The true pathfinder, even in the world of mechanics, is the man who first sees, and then declares what experience confirms to be, the truth! When this obvious and

commonplace fact is applied to the Hebrew prophets; when further, we recall their intimacy with and passionate loyalty to, the God of truth, it is easy to understand their place as an indispensable "asset" in the nation's life, and their permanent value to the religious training of the world.

This high claim for the place and ministry of the prophet—then and now—requires us to look with some care into the nature of their equipment, and the character of the training, by which they became so eminent as the great religious teachers of their time. And we touch at once the sources of their knowledge, and the strength of their conviction when we say, that, like the apologists and first witnesses of Christianity, they just "declared the things they had seen and heard."[1]

God sought them, for He longed to get His thought enshrined in human moulds, so that gradually, the world may be prepared for His fuller revelation in Jesus. And the prophets eagerly sought God, moved as they were by the deep consciousness of their own and their people's need, convinced that only as God came to their help, could deliverance be found.

And it was out of this double search and response, this interplay of Divine longing and human answer, that the training and equipment came which made the prophet the vehicle of the ever-widening revelation of God. Necessarily the education, working as it could only do, through the experience and growing capacity of these pupils of the Spirit, moved forward

[1] 1 John i. 3.

from less to more, forming an ever-growing deposit of living truth, which, cast forth by the prophets as seed, while enriching their own life, secured the religious development of the nation.

It is in this directness of contact with God, with man, with the facts of life as they looked out upon them, that we find the chief elements of their training. The Hebrew mind was not given to abstract reasoning. It did not concern itself with first principles. It had neither bent nor liking for philosophical discussion. And therefore the Hebrew prophet, reflecting the highest and noblest type of the Hebrew mind, worked directly and immediately with the actualities of life as they faced them day by day.

These statements apply with greater accuracy to the pre-exilic prophets, and would undoubtedly require considerable modification in the case of the later prophets. That is only what might be expected. But in the main, it is true of all. They were little concerned about theories or abstractions. Their sense of God was profound and real. Yahweh was to them a living reality, not a doctrine. To know His mind, and to declare it, was for them the chief concern of life. And to bring their fellow-men to a life of obedience to Yahweh's will, alike in the interests of the people themselves, and the prosperity of the community and land as a whole, was a duty worth any effort, either of service or of suffering.

Thus, starting with primal, but fundamental, laws and facts, and keeping a constantly open mind

and heart to the ever-widening horizon of truth, they became the recipients of an imperishable wealth of teaching, and the fitting heralds of Him who at length appeared in Palestine, as emphatically and finally, "The Truth!"

(1) We start with the actual contents and implications of the prophetic revelation of God. Here our indebtedness to the prophets is unspeakably great and permanent. There is no parallel to it. The development of the idea of God, from a tribal, local, and national deity—one among the gods of the nations—to the sublime monotheism of the Prophet of the exile, registers the profoundest change of thought ever wrought in history, and we owe it chiefly to the clearer insight and unwearying persistence of the prophets.

We have only to contrast the crude ideas of the twelfth century with the fifth century B.C.—the times of the Judges with the days of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and second Isaiah—to estimate the work of the prophets in this fundamental postulate of religion, the belief in, and the view of, God.

In the pre-prophetic period, even after the early settlement in Canaan, Israel shared with all other nations, the idea of a tribal, local god. Yahweh had His home in Sinai, as the deities of other nations had their separate centres, and, seeing Israel had been chosen as the people of Yahweh, He must be summoned to fight their battles, and lead them to victory. The supremacy of the deity, and continued loyalty to Him, largely depended upon whether He showed superior strength over rival

gods, and brought victory to the tribe. Gradually, as the people settled in Canaan, it was accepted that Yahweh had transferred His home to the new land, and the land and people of Canaan had become His special care. Nor, as yet, judged by the higher ethical standards of the prophets—taught as they were of God—had the people as a whole, invested their deity with what we should regard, as an ethical content. He is mainly, as the gods of other nations, a great warrior, largely indifferent to the life of the people, so long as He is victorious, and commands the loyalty of His own nation.

In proof of this, let the reader turn to the immoralities exposed by Amos, as far down as the eighth century, notwithstanding the work of such great teachers as Moses, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, Elisha, and others. For it must not be supposed that the lofty view of these leaders, or the modified monotheism of Amos, was shared by the people as a whole. Nay, rather, it was against the general degradation of view, that they rose up in such indignant protest, which created the need for such protest, and justified it.

Even Amaziah, the priest of Yahweh, is content with the prevailing view of deity, which sanctioned the worship of Yahweh with Canaanite immoralities. He was quite willing that robbery, oppression, and the extravagances of wealth should go on unchecked, even though it bore so hardly upon the poor of Israel, equally with the rich, the people of Yahweh.

What so shocked Amos was, that this should represent the contemporary religion, and that it

should stand for a view of God, beyond which, apparently, the Israelites had no desire to reach.

This protest of Amos, steadily followed up as it was, enlarged and amplified through growing knowledge and experience by successive prophets, enables us to understand how the idea of God was moralized, and why the relation between Him and His people gradually took on high moral obligations.

Unlike the deities of the surrounding peoples, Yahweh was a God of character, and demanded moral qualities on the part of those who acknowledged Him. Not that the prophets were the first to teach this view of Yahweh. Such a moral relationship had been revealed from the time of the Exodus. It had been urged repeatedly by such leaders as Moses, Joshua, Samuel, Nathan and Elijah. Yet, so slow were the people to understand, and so ingrained were the corrupting ideas of deity, and so persistent the curse of custom, as to explain the moral laxity in the name of religion, which was exposed and condemned by Amos.

It was this, first of all, that each prophet in turn sought to correct. Since Yahweh, their God, was so different in moral character from all other gods, they, His people, must be true to His moral standards. Being righteous Himself, they must reflect in their dealings with each other, a righteousness like unto His own. In other nations, the god, regarding the community as a whole or as a unit, was indifferent to the conduct of the individual. So long as the community remained uninjured, the individual could do as he chose. The god assisted the tribe

or the nation as a whole, and, so long as the proper sacrifices were offered, and the ritual of the religion was duly performed, he was quite content.

These were the ideas Israel shared, and to which they stubbornly and persistently adhered. The prophets set themselves resolutely to combat and overturn these unworthy views:—Amos, with his insistence upon God's demand for righteousness of life; Hosea, with his revelation of God's love and pity, wounded and suffering because of Israel's unfaithfulness, yet longing for the return of His bride; Micah, sustaining and enforcing Amos in his denunciation of ritual as a substitute for right conduct; Isaiah, with his lofty teaching of God's unsullied purity, and his, as yet, unapproached doctrine of God's greatness. This was the teaching, and these were the teachers, whose instruction merged into and prepared the way for, the spiritual conceptions of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the superb, even yet, unsurpassed representations of that religious genius, the second Isaiah. "For thy Maker is thine husband; the Lord of Hosts is his name: and the Holy One of Israel is thy redeemer, the God of the whole earth shall he be called."[1] There the pure monotheism to which the prophets had led the nation rings out, even though, to realize and appreciate it, the external bonds of nationhood had to be broken! Unsurpassed too for beauty, the monotheism of Isaiah xl. 9–31, and unrivalled, for polished irony and convincing argument, the exposure of idolatry in Isaiah xliv. 6–24.

[1] Isa. liv. 5.

Inherent in the prophetic teaching of God, there lay, as in germ, a high and sacred doctrine of man. Though this too was reached late, through long education, involving gross wrong on the part of tyrants, and intense suffering on the part of the many, yet the clear and unmistakable enunciation of individual worth and responsibility such as is found in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, is a further tribute to the unique and permanent value of the prophet's work.

Primarily, as the late lamented Principal Bennett points out,[1] the prophets are largely concerned with communities, especially with Israel. The community or nation was first, the individual second. From the first the tendency of Judaism had been to depreciate the unit, and exalt the nation. It was the Jew that mattered rather than the man; and the Jew because he was the citizen of such a nation, the member of such a family. Individual interests were of little concern, the only interests allowed to him were those he shared with the community.

This meant, almost inevitably, that man had ceased to recognize himself in his individual relationship toward God. And further, inevitably, lightly esteemed by others, man estimated himself lightly, and individual responsibility was largely unknown. No wonder that out of generations of such teaching, the standards of morality were lax, human life was cheap, womanhood was debased, and child-life largely ignored. As showing the persistence

[1] *Post-exilic Prophets*, p. 238.

of this "community view," one of the recognized prayers of the Rabbis even in the days of Jesus and the Apostles, gave thanks to God that the worshipper was not born a Gentile, or a woman!

Now, it was impossible that the prophets, gaining first-hand such a lofty view of God as we have just described, could countenance such an unworthy view of individual worth and responsibility. So true it is, that a great and worthy conception of God determines everything! If God has made man, then no man can be despised. He stands out before God in his individuality, as worth the whole expenditure of Deity. The prophets, because they preached a real Theocracy—the authority and rule of God—in that, and because of it, are the first heralds of a true democracy, the recognition of man's right, not as a member of a community, or class, or birth, but as man, as the offspring and child of God.

And it is exceedingly significant, as proving the inherent dynamic of this view—its conquering power over mere class distinction and prejudice—that, as the national bond weakened, the truth of man's individual worth shone forth with increasing clearness. Hence the later teaching of Jeremiah, with his distinctive and remarkable emphasis on the "New Covenant," where,—following the scattering of the nation—the bond will be no longer communal, but individual.[1]

So too, in Ezekiel, living and working among the exiles, we have a doctrine of individual responsi-

[1] Jer. xxxi. 33, 34.

bility, alike for the teacher and the taught,[1] which forms the pattern for us still.

The whole view is well summed up by Principal Skinner :—"So long as the Jewish state existed the principle of solidarity remained in force. Men suffered for the sins of their ancestors ; individuals shared the punishment incurred by the nation as a whole. But as soon as the nation is dead, when the bonds that unite men in the organism of national life are dissolved, then the idea of individual responsibility comes into immediate operation.[2]

(3) We have seen that the prophets sought to relate everything to God. Their thought always went to the outlook, the mind, the purpose of Deity, as an arrow to its mark. They were not given to speculation, to abstract reasoning, or to the discussion of origins. What was His thought ? How did the conduct of man affect Him ? And how were the actual facts of human sin and consequent suffering to be so corrected, as to secure the happy relationship God desired ?

It is true the prophets did not create the sense of sin. That goes back to the beginning. No word is more deeply written in the human consciousness than the word "ought." Even in the days when Israel shared the current tribal view of religion, the customary morality of heathen peoples was left behind by the statement, that "no such thing ought to be done in Israel."[3] Undoubtedly the earlier morality of the nation shared

[1] Ezek. xxxiii. 1–9, xviii. 20–24.
[2] *Expositor's Bible, Ezekiel* p. 143. [3] 2 Sam. xiii. 12.

the general prevailing tendency to externalism, in keeping with the habit of confining religion to observances or ritual; and so it came to pass that practices were tolerated which the prophetic religion vehemently denounced.

Certainly we owe it to the prophets that they deepened the sense of sin. They set it forth in its true light as shocking "rebellion" against God.[1] They dwelt upon the infamy of it, the disgrace of it, as a state of open infidelity against the God who had taken Israel as His bride.[2]

Taking the view of God they did, and of the possibility of such an intimate relationship on the part of man with Him, marking further the actual facts of life, the prophets could do no other. It is true, that, as we have seen, up to the times of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, their treatment of it dealt chiefly with Israel, and with the "corporate personality" of Israel, as the people of Yahweh. It is further true that the prophets were a long way in advance of the people, who held on to the non-ethical quality of actions, and simply regarded them as trespasses, or divided them into acts of cleanness and uncleanness. That only serves to illustrate the greatness of the moral revolution effected by the prophets. They lifted the standard. The insertion of this wedge of truth, driven in by the unsparing faithfulness of a long line of teachers, prepared the way for the lofty and final teaching of Jesus concerning the awfulness of sin.

Prof. Whitehouse goes so far as to say "that

[1] Isa. i. 2. [2] Hosea ii. 5–13.

the sense of ethical sin was mainly developed in the national consciousness by the teaching of the prophets."[1] No greater tribute to the debt we owe them could be paid. For it passed on through the nation, and so made Israel the custodian of the loftiest morality and the finest spirituality the world up to that point had known. Nor can any teaching which makes light of sin, or attempts to reduce it to a mere mistake or accident, belong to the prophetic order or receive prophetic sanction. A great view of God, and a worthy view of man, will always compel us to subscribe to the judgment of God's servants the prophets, who correctly describe sin as "this abominable thing that God hates."[2]

(4) When we pass to the question of suffering, with the related themes of sacrifice, repentance, and forgiveness, we find the prophetic literature revealing a wealth of treatment and of treasure, which, beyond any dogmatic statement, proves the Divine inspiration and guidance of these teachers of Israel. The prophets—especially the earlier prophets—as interpreters of Israel's history, dwelt mainly upon suffering as penal or disciplinary, and, if calamity and judgment are to be averted, the causes of it, in the wilfulness and sin of the people, must be put away.

It would almost seem, as though in their view suffering and sin are organically connected. They insist that suffering is the inevitable consequence of sin.[3] And that Israel should suffer, that in

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 99.
[2] Jer. xliv. 4. [3] Amos iii. 10, 11; iv. 6–12.

turn the nations of Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt should be used as "God's scourge,"[1] to punish the nation for its national forgetfulness of God, and its persistent disloyalty, was only to say that God's rule was moral, and that any breach of it deserved punishment.

How this view of the relation of sin and suffering as cause and effect persisted, and how it was regarded in the popular mind as a general solution of the whole problem, is seen in the question of the disciples of Jesus, faced with the suffering of the man born blind:—"Rabbi, who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?"[2]

As yet indeed, while the view of the "corporate personality" of Israel lasted, the idea of the educative ministries of suffering, its power to culture and mature the finer qualities of the human spirit, still more, what we speak of as "vicarious suffering," or the voluntary choice and acceptance of it as a distinction and honour in the interests of others, had not emerged.

But, in pointing out the limitation of the older view, we certainly dishonour the great teachers of Israel, if we minimize its importance for the people then, or its necessary content of truth for men still. The world is moral. God's government of it is moral and righteous. It is always true, and it is still necessary to teach, that if men will break through the hedge of moral permissions, they will assuredly be punished.[3]

[1] Isa. x. 26; xxviii. 18.
[2] John ix. 2. [3] Eccles. x. 8.

The rights of the individual, however, cannot be ignored. Nor, in the light of actual experience, could this "general view" and these sweeping conclusions, escape considerable modification. What of the individuals of the nation—and they must have been many—whose secret loyalty, and whose courageous witness, while including them in the general condemnation, drove in a sense of injustice, that their loyalty had counted for nothing, and was, apparently, ignored? Was it right that the innocent should suffer? If God loved the people of Israel, did He not also love the units making up the whole, and was it right to include the innocent in the judgment and penalty of the guilty?

This was the problem definitely raised by Jeremiah,[1] as the break-up of the nation drew ever nearer. It became the key-note of Ezekiel's teaching away among the exiles. Later still, it occupied the mind, and forms the profound argument of the author of the Book of Job, as indeed it has since been and is still, the problem for all who ponder the question of the moral government of the world.

The current view was embodied in the well-known and oft-stated proverb, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."[2] For the first time both Jeremiah and Ezekiel set themselves to contest the popular idea as unjust to the innocent, and their protest represented little short of a revolution in thought:—"The

[1] Jer. xii. 1,; xv. 18. [2] Jer. xxxi. 29; Ezek. xviii. 2.

soul that sinneth," says Ezekiel, "*it* shall die."[1]

The truth that one should suffer with and for others, was indeed held in a crude way, in the old days of the tribal religion, with its idea of solidarity. The blood-tie, or the communal bond, or again, as in the case of Achan,[2] the safety of the tribe or community, made it inevitable, "a regrettable necessity." There is no indication of it as an act of religious faith. It is akin rather to the law of blood-revenge, meeting us in the story of the religions of the world, and in the earlier narratives of Scripture.

The story of David, who consulted the oracle of Yahweh, concerning the three years' famine, is a case in point. "And the Lord said, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonites."[3] And when the seven members of Saul's family were sacrificed, there was neither thought of virtue on the one side, nor of wrong on the other. They were offered up as an act of social justice, and also to turn away the "anger of Yahweh," who, as the guardian of social morality, had been offended.

What a contrast is presented to us, and what a concrete illustration it offers of Israel's religious development, as we pass from the tenth to the fifth century teaching on the question of vicarious suffering! These dark, suffering centuries have not been without their value. Not in vain the

[1] Ezek. xviii. 4. [2] Joshua vii. 24–26.
[3] 2 Sam. xxi. 1.

discarded and rejected prophets, who have prepared the way for such teaching as that of the sublime prophet of the exile![1]

For it is here we reach the highest point of teaching to which the Old Testament rises, stated in a form which for sheer nobility and beauty is even now unsurpassed! It is where Israel, idealized and personified as the "Servant of Yahweh," is represented as suffering vicariously for other nations, that through such suffering and death, Israel may be fitted for world-service, and honoured as the chosen one of God to bring the world of nations within the family of the redeemed. It does not lessen the value of this teaching to say that it had an immediate and national purpose, and that there is no reason to suppose the prophet saw in vision the life and work of Him who alone fills out the glowing picture. Nay, rather, it magnifies the teaching, and increases its wonder to say, that there is only one Person in history who in Himself and in His suffering and death has realized this superb representation of vicarious sorrow and service.

The deep Christian sentiment of each successive generation has rightly read the fulfilment of the prophet's vision in Jesus.

(5) As for sacrifice, while the prophets and the prophetic writings are full of the idea, it is true, as Principal Bennett says, "The Old Testament has no theory of sacrifice."[2] The prophets and law-

[1] Isa. xlii. 1–4; xlix. 1–6; l. 4–9; lii. 13—liii. 12.
[2] *Post-exilic Prophets*, p. 323.

givers did not invent sacrifices; they found them existing as part of the normal religious life of the people. It is generally true to say, that originally it was the natural expression of gratitude, as a gift to deity, either to win his favour, or appease his anger, or as a means of communion with him in the sharing of a common meal.[1]

Later on, down through the time of the pre-exilic prophets, the people clearly thought of sacrifice as a means of securing the help of Yahweh, and as a protection against their enemies. It was this formal, commercial, or bargaining view of sacrifice against which the prophets so sternly and insistently protested. They urged that Yahweh had no pleasure in the mere offering or gift, as though it represented a payment due. What He desired, was the sacrifice of the obedient life, the inward devotion of the heart, expressing itself in worthy conduct.

(6) We owe it to the prophets that they steadily kept the ethical significance of the various kinds of sacrifices before their people, particularly as it called them to repentance and confession, and secured for them the answering forgiveness of God.

Speaking from inside knowledge, Dr. Claude G. Montefiore, makes the striking claim, that, "in the doctrine of repentance the Jewish religion developed one of its noblest and most prominent features. For the nation and for the individual God has given in the Law the great Day of Atonement, a day consecrated to human repentance and to

[1] Gen. iv. 4; viii. 21; Exod. xxiv. 5-11.

Divine forgiveness, a day which was gradually becoming more ethical and spiritual, and was destined, with the fall of the Temple, to become more ethical and spiritual still. Thus, with its doctrines of repentance, of the Divine goodness, and the Divine forgiveness, the Jewish religion managed very well in the problems of goodness and of sin. It made things neither too easy nor too difficult; man must always strive, but God would help. Man must always fail, but his own repentance and the Divine forgiveness prevented despair."[1]

The modern preacher will find in the prophets his models for the present day plea for repentance, the reasons for it, the nature of it, the happy issue to which it leads. Save in the call of Jesus Himself, there is nothing greater in literature than the pleading of these men, jealous as they were for the Divine honour.

Where indeed, for tenderness of appeal or true pathos, can the heart-cry of Hosea be surpassed :— "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. Take with you words, and return unto the Lord; say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good"?[2] Or where is there to be found a more exquisite setting of the forgiveness which follows true repentance than in this immediate reply: "I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him"; and in the promise which follows: "I will be as

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 623. [2] Hosea xiv. 1, 2.

the dew unto Israel: he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon," etc.?[1]

(7) There is nothing in the prophetic literature answering to the Christian doctrine of the future life. It was not to be expected. That could only come in the "fulness of time." Life, in all that God meant for it, including, as it did, Immortality, could be brought to light only through the Gospel.[2]

We have seen that the prophets were intensely practical men. They had no inclination—it did not fall within the scope of their work—to discuss questions of mere speculative interest. They were almost entirely, if not wholly, concerned with the existing and possible relation of their nation to God, and with the training of a community of people whose loyalty to Yahweh would make them the "praise of the whole earth."

The question of personal immortality lay outside their range. As we shall see later, when we consider the Messianic hope they did so much to train, they believed in a future, and looked forward to it. But it was a belief bound up with the future of their own nation, as being too glorious and far-reaching to be confined within the brief limits of any given time. And therefore such eschatology as we find in the pre-exilic life of Israel, is entirely confined to the questions of the Divine judgment on Israel and the surrounding nations, and the ultimate exaltation of Israel.

When we come to the exilic and post-exilic periods, where prophecy passes more and more

[1] Hosea xiv. 4, 5–7. [2] 2 Tim. i. 10.

into apocalyptic, we find the questions of the future commanding greater prominence, and leading on to the definite teaching of a resurrection from the dead. Yet even so, in the late apocalyptic passages, Isaiah xxv. 6–9, xxvi. 14–19,[1] nothing more is taught than the resurrection of faithful Israelites, and not of man as such, and it is to a resumption of life on earth, in Palestine, with a restored Jerusalem, as its centre. And in so late a writing as the Book of Daniel,[2] containing as it does the most definite statement of the Old Testament concerning the resurrection life, examination shows it to be qualified by the "many," and the "many" are those who have been conspicuous for good or for evil. And here again, it is to a restored life on earth.

But this "forward look" of the prophets, working upon the generally accepted belief in "survival" beyond the grave, carried in it as its germ, the certainty of the later teaching. In this the Hebrew, as over against and superior to all the religions of ancient and contemporary life, proclaims its unique, its Divine origin.

If, for a moment, we leave the prophets, and pass to that great song-book of the religious life, the Psalter, we find there the outgoings of longing, and the statements of a faith in God and the future on the part of elect souls of that nation, coming little short of the New Testament hope. Even yet, the faith of the individual Christian in any land or circumstance, appropriates the exquisite

[1] See p. 74. [2] Dan. xii. 2.

setting of the sweet singer of Israel, and finds it sufficient :—

" Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory.
Whom have I in heaven but thee ?
And there is none upon earth I desire beside thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth :
But God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." [1]

Or this final aspiration, representing the highest gain of immortality :—

" As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness,
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." [2]

It was impossible that such a God as the prophets knew, and whom such choice souls as this singer hymned, should fail of His purpose. And they were content to leave it there. We pay them the highest tribute if we say, that they found the immortality they desired in loving service of Him, and as for the rest, they rested in the assurance of which still another elect soul sang :—

" Thou wilt shew me the path of life :
In thy presence is fulness of joy ;
In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." [3]

[1] Psa. lxxiii. 24–26. [2] Psa. xvii. 15. [3] Psa. xvi. 11.

CHAPTER V

The Messianic Hope and Ideal.

IF the claim we have already advanced is true, that there is nothing in the history of religions, like the steady development of the local, tribal, and national conception of Deity, such as existed in early Israel, reaching at length the sublime monotheism of the later prophets, it is also true, that there is no parallel in other religions to what is generally described as the "Messianic hope of Israel."

Nowhere else do we find the unity and power of one sustaining, redeeming, all-mastering idea, such as the glowing picture of the Messianic ideal embodied; appearing and re-appearing through successive generations, now in one form, now in another, until, in the fulness of time—though, alas! Israel knew it not—it received a fulfilment quite undreamed of in the person and work of Jesus.

In these later days we have been privileged to witness the crowning proof of Divine action, working in and through Israel's history. It is this

which invests the inquiry now before us with such perennial interest. On the side of Israel's external or contemporary life—the side which formed the Gethsemane of the prophets—Israel was even as other peoples, and her history is as the common bush of the desert. We follow a story of vacillation and weakness, of stumbling and shame. Yet, as we watch it, behold! the bush burns with a fire, which, while it does not consume, transforms! So that instinctively we are made to feel, as we do not and cannot feel in pursuing the histories of other peoples and religions, the awe and reverence that declares the abiding presence of the Divine!

Here indeed we touch the ultimate origin, and the innermost secret of the Messianic hope of Israel. With the actual, the historic explanation of it, we shall be engaged in this chapter. It is safe here to say, using the advantage of our later perspective, that the legitimate issue of this hope is the wonder and glory of Jesus; that God's purpose in the calling and training of Israel was too great to be accomplished in any one age, or by any given cycle of events; that, beyond any actual horizon of man's vision, there is

> "One far-off, Divine event
> To which the whole creation moves."

An event, which, while explaining all the past, will finally vindicate and declare the God of Israel, as the Redeemer of the whole earth.

In these last sentences, however—let us face it frankly and at once—we are reading back from the line of historic knowledge, and not at all from

the line of prophetic vision. Nothing is gained for truth by supposing that there was given to any of the prophets the definite portrait of Jesus, or that they projected in advance the outline of His life, sufferings, and death. Even supposing such a portrait to have been given, it would have conveyed no meaning or value to their own people, nor is it conceivable that any useful purpose would have been served by it.

The aim and mission of the prophets was much more immediate and practical. It was theirs to warn, to counsel, and to inspire their people; to increase among them the knowledge of God, and to keep alive and active the hope of a glorious destiny. Filled with an unquenchable enthusiasm for God, assured that in calling them, God cherished hopes and purposes for them worthy of Himself, they sought to make Israel the worthy custodians of a love and grace, which, being His, must include a future for them and for the world, in keeping with One so great, and with a love so gracious.

In all this the prophets were one with the choicest and noblest of their race from the beginning. Explain it as we may, the consciousness of destiny possessed the finest minds of the Hebrew people. It recurs, like the dominant theme of an oratorio, through all the varied clash, the discord and harmony of their long and chequered history.

It would be easy, beginning with the celebrated passage in Genesis, relating to the enmity and bruising of the serpent;[1] the repeated covenant

[1] Gen. iii. 15.

with Abraham;[1] and the famous reference to Shiloh[2]—mistakenly interpreted as Messiah—and on through the subsequent books of the Bible, to discover the basis for such a national consciousness of destiny.

Not that the references given, with the probable exception of the last,[3] or many of the kindred promises found later, are in themselves Messianic. True exegesis compels us to say they each have a bearing and an interpretation more immediately practical and useful. But they served to form the habit of the "forward look" on the part of the best minds of Israel. They assisted the growth of that optimism, which, even in the darkest days of national life, was never absent, nay rather, as we shall see, was often the most radiant and confident, when the immediate outlook was most unpromising.

This raises for us once more,[4] in a definite form, the general question of predictive prophecy, of which Messianic prophecy forms by far the most considerable portion. While it is no longer possible to retain the old, mechanical views of inspiration and prophecy, as an arbitrary possession of the human personality by a Divine power, using it as the passive and often unconscious recipient of visions and messages relating only to some remote age, we must equally guard against the purely rationalistic view, that sees in the visions and

[1] Gen. xii. 1–3; xiii. 14–18; xvii. 1–8.
[2] Gen. xlix. 8–12. [3] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 166.
[4] See pp. 33–36.

descriptions of the prophets nothing more than a future ideal state, a golden age of human life, brought in as the inevitable issue and accompaniment of a moral evolutionary process.

Such a view, taking no account of the action and inter-action of the overruling Spirit of God, raises far more difficulties for the reason than it professes to remove. As a matter of fact, reading the history of the nations, we know that it does not so work out. This rationalistic theory does not cover either the practical idealism of the prophet's vision, or the subsequent facts of history. It is unscientific as well as unhistoric, seeing that on such a theory, the effects are immeasurably greater than the cause.

Granted such a God as the Hebrew prophets knew, as seen also in His unfolding purpose through our world-history, and as finally revealed in Jesus, it is only to be expected that through those whom He intimately knew, whose willing surrender, made them the worthy mediums of revelation, He would, if He desired, declare purposes and happenings far beyond the ordinary skill and vision of men to discern. Surely we may not, for any human theory whatever, attempt to limit either the freedom or the power of the Infinite Love!

That the element of prediction in the prophets is far less than was once supposed, as though it was history written beforehand; that many prophetic references, once regarded as applying to events far distant—even down to the years and details of the late European war, with the apportionment of territory by the Peace Conference which

followed—found their explanation in fulfilments much nearer to hand, these are conclusions, not only in keeping with the findings of the most reverent scholarship, but, what is even more important, with the general scope and purpose of the Divine rule and government of the world.

So when we find, as we do, definite predictions in the pages of the prophets, relating to individuals, specific events, impending disaster, we say with Amos :— "Surely Yahweh will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets."[1] Both Amos and Isaiah foretold the downfall of the Northern Kingdom, Amos, forty years before it occurred,[2] and Isaiah when Israel's prosperity appeared to mock the prophet's words.[3] And again, Isaiah predicts the safety of Jerusalem, in the face of the threatening advance and might of Sennacherib.[4] Jeremiah predicts the death of Hananiah within twelve months,[5] and the ultimate downfall of Jerusalem.[6] Yet, while such references could be multiplied, it is still true that definite or specific predictions of this kind are not the rule. The scope of predictive prophecy is vastly wider, may we not add, worthier, in its range. The history of the world is a redemptive history, and prophecy, as Prof. A. B. Davidson has pointed out, in such a redeeming purpose was an "absolute necessity."[7] Since redemption is God's goal, and

[1] Amos iii. 7. [2] Amos v. 27; vi. 14.
[3] Isa. x. 5. [4] Isa. xxxvii. 33–35.
[5] Jer. xxviii. 16. [6] Jer. xxxii. 3–5.
[7] *Theol. of O.T.*, p. 104.

destruction is His strange work,[1] prophecy is part of the cosmic process by which He will sustain the hope, enlarge the vision, and extend the knowledge of men, culminating at length in Him who fulfilled all prophecy, the Son of man, the Saviour of the world.

(2) And here it is that we reach the nature and explanation of the prophecy definitely known as Messianic. Undoubtedly it is difficult for us, looking back, to conceive of the Messianic Kingdom apart from Jesus, the Messiah. But our point of approach now is the knowledge and standpoint of the prophets, and clearly, the thought of a personal Messiah was not an essential element in the earlier Jewish hope. That came much later. It begins to find more definite expression after the exile, though in the main, through all, the emphasis is rather upon the restored future of Israel, ruled by the Ideal King as the visible representative or administrator of Yahweh, than upon any distinctive personality, that stress is laid.[2]

The prophets were not concerned with any particular individual. Their purpose was rather to strengthen the faith and encourage the hope of Israel in the anticipation of a glorious future. It could not be that a God such as Yahweh, or that a history such as theirs, with such evidences of Divine selection and purpose, could end in any partial or national triumph!

The glory of Yahweh their God carried with it the certainty of a future far more glorious, such

[1] Isa. xxviii. 21. [2] Zech. ix. 9.

as would make His name a praise and glory before all the nations of earth.[1]

The weighty words of Dr. Charles on this theme, are of the utmost value. "The Jewish prophet could not help looking forward to the advent of the Kingdom of God, but he found no difficulty in conceiving that Kingdom without a Messiah. Thus there is no mention of the Messiah in Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Joel, Daniel: none even in the very full eschatological prophecies of Isaiah xxiv.–xxvii., or in the brilliant descriptions of the future in Isaiah liv. 11–17, lx.-lxii., lxv., lxvi., which spring from various post-exilic writers. Nor is the situation different when we pass from the Old Testament to the subsequent Jewish literature. . . . Hence it follows that, in Jewish prophecy and apocalyptic the Messiah was no organic factor of the Kingdom. Sometimes he was conceived as present, but, just as frequently, absent. When he was absent, the Kingdom was always represented as under the immediate sovereignty of God. Thus Jewish prophecy and apocalyptic represent the Kingdom either as under the direct rule of God, or else of the Messiah as God's representative."[2]

This view entirely agrees with a careful examination of the Old Testament records. The prophets were concerned with keeping before themselves and before the nation, the glorious vision of an ideal future, not only for them, but through them,

[1] Ezek. xxxvi. 20, 23; Isa. lii. 6; Jer. xxxiii. 9; Isa. lv. 12, 13.
[2] *Expositor*, Sixth Series, vol. v. p. 250.

for the world. And, remembering the shocking unfaithfulness of their own time, and the utter hopelessness of the situation as they looked out upon the horizons limiting them, it is as splendid and as mighty a triumph of faith, as anything to be found in our long human story. Nothing could be a truer corrective of our modern pessimism, as we face the terrible world-situation following the war, than the overcoming faith and hope which lived in the happy vision of God's universal rule. Herein the prophets are still our teachers!

When we turn to our Scriptures we find, that, apart from the Authorised Version of Daniel ix. 25-26, the term "Messiah" is not found in the Old Testament. For the Revised Version gives the more correct rendering, "anointed one."[1] The Hebrew word translated "Messiah," as also its Greek equivalent, "Christos," meaning "anointed," has a very wide and general application in the Old Testament. So far from setting forth any particular individual, it is rather in its original form, an adjective. It is used of things set apart for Yahweh's use,[2] of Israel as a nation,[3] of patriarchs,[4] of priests,[5] and, very generally, of kings.[6] And in Haggai[7] and Zechariah,[8] it is Zerubbabel, Judah's governor in 520 B.C. who is welcomed as the Messianic prince.

[1] Dan. ix. 25, 26 (R.V.).
[2] Lev. viii. 10, 30 [3] Hab. iii. 13.
[4] Psa. cv. 15. [5] Lev. iv. 3.
[6] 1 Sam. xv. 1; 2 Sam. ii. 4; 1 Kings i. 34; Psa. ii. 2; Isa. xlv. 1.
[7] Haggai ii. 23. [8] Zech. iii. 8; iv. 9; vi. 12

(3) It is with this general view of the Messiah as "God's anointed" in mind, that we may usefully follow the development of the Messianic hope in Israel, and the form it took in successive prophets. It is a study of entrancing interest. Its chief value will lie in the fact, that while through the long centuries, the best minds of Israel held to and passed on ideals, each in their measure, Messianic, it is only in Jesus that the sum total of the best hope of Israel's prophets is realized and infinitely surpassed.

"Prophecy is a unity. A great connecting purpose runs through it, binding it all together. It is an essential element in the Divine scheme of the redemption of the world through Christ. His work rested upon theirs. His revelation of the Father was the consummation and the vindication of their revelation of the God of Israel."[1]

It was quite natural that the earliest and most persistent form of the hope which sustained Israel, should centre in the theocratic kingship. While this view dominates all the prophets, it is, as might be expected, prominent so long as the monarchy lasted. After the destruction of the monarchy, and particularly as time wore on, the hope centres in the people as the suffering Servant of Yahweh, and, later still, at the Restoration, in the priest, or the union of the priestly and kingly functions.

The foundation of this form of the Messianic hope, reposes on the Divine promise through Nathan

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 430.

to David, that his house should never cease to bear rule in the kingdom of Yahweh.[1] It is a promise frequently referred to in Scripture.[2] David's establishment and settlement of Israel's national life had deeply and permanently stamped itself upon the popular imagination as representing all that was desirable in national life. While neither Amos nor Hosea have any reference to the Messiah, they each go back to the rule of David for their ideal of national felicity.[3] People and prophet alike idealized David, so that his reign with its achievements, stood for them as a model and a pride.

In general outline and briefly, the pattern is made up of a king, wise and good, living in happy relationship with his people, neither possessing foes without nor fearing any, but enjoying unbroken prosperity. This, at any rate at first, filled up the content of the Messianic ideal. And though, as might be expected, it was greatly expanded, these elements are found in all the later developments. "For the heathen poet," it has been said, "the golden age lies in the past. For the Hebrew prophet, it lies in the future." We need no other proof that a Divine intention runs through all the history of Israel, compelling the "forward look." But for this, the greatness and glory of David's reign, as idealized by the people, would have arrested progress, and fixed the golden age

[1] 2 Sam. vii. 11–16.
[2] 2 Sam. xxiii. 5; 1 Kings xi. 13, 36; Psa. ii.
[3] Amos ix. 11; Hosea iii. 5.

of Israel in the past! As it was, the prophets, starting with David, exalted and enlarged the vision, cherishing the hope and fostering the longing for a time when the theocratic kingship, ruling all peoples, would be everywhere acknowledged, and Yahweh, their God, be enthroned as the undisputed king of all the earth.

For some of the loftiest visions, and the noblest statements of the Messianic Ideal, Israel and the world since Israel's day, is indebted to Isaiah. Remembering his close association with the royal house of Judah, it is not surprising that, especially at first, with such a disreputable representative of David's house as the wicked Ahaz on the throne, Isaiah should idealize the figure of the King, or that later, the glory of the Kingship, as centralized in Yahweh Himself, who would be Judge, Lawgiver, Monarch, and Saviour,[1] should fill his thought and speech.

Isaiah's training and genius was the greatest gift of God to his own generation. His long and unique ministry in the capital, his transparent sincerity and proved loyalty, secured him a commanding position. In the difficult circumstances and fiery test of the time, with the enormous power of Assyria as a constant menace and peril to his nation, Isaiah found his opportunity.

Never was a critical position more heroically faced, or more triumphantly overcome. As the danger grew ever more serious, drawing nearer and nearer, his faith in God shone forth with ever

[1] Isa. xxxiii. 22.

increasing clearness. Out of the stock of Jesse would come a scion or branch of the royal house,[1] out of the "stump"[2] or root of Israel, a new Israel, a "holy remnant,"[3] and thus would God confound the designs of evil. "The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall perform this."[4] All this places Isaiah among the premier prophets of the world. No wonder that preachers have always found in him the human ideal of their prophetic ministry, and in his writings one of their most fruitful sources of sermon material.

For Isaiah's victory of faith, and his sheer defiance of existing conditions, is one of the greatest achievements of history. At a time when Syria and Ephraim were threatening to conquer Judah and abolish the Davidic dynasty, and Ahaz was purchasing, at the price of his country's independence, relief from the danger with which the coalition threatened him, Isaiah sought to re-assure the king, promising him speedy deliverance and giving him the sign of Immanuel.[5] The faith of the mother, embodied in the name she is to give her child, "God is with us," is a reproof to the king's unbelief.

It is in the significance of the name, as declaring the mother's conviction that God is with His people, that we discover the real purpose of the declaration of the prophet. It is not in the wonderful birth of the child or in the child himself, that the im-

[1] Isa. xi. 1. [2] Isa. vi. 13.
[3] Isa. x. 20, 21, 22; xi. 11, 16.
[4] Isa. ix. 7; xxxvii. 32. [5] Isa. vii. 14.

portance of the passage is to be found.[1] The "Immanuel" of this prophecy is not to be identified with the Messianic King mentioned later,[2] opening to us, as this wonderful scripture does, the most striking portrait of the Messianic hope as yet portrayed.

For while it is not necessary to believe that Isaiah saw the New Testament picture of Jesus in vision—nothing would have been intelligible or useful to his own people in such a case—yet it is certain that "Jesus only" embodies and makes actual these matchless word-pictures of kingly rule, and immeasurably transcends them. Only in Him can we understand the truth of the God-Man, or explain the wonder of the Prince of the Four Names.[3]

Such a view makes the contribution of Isaiah to the faithful of his own time, and to the culture of true faith in the world, not the less, but all the more precious and permanent. Later on, under the better days of Hezekiah, and with returning hope for the house of David, Isaiah is silent concerning the ideal personal king, and is occupied entirely with the sovereignty and glory of Yahweh as the God of Israel.

A century later, another great prophet, Jeremiah, with his contemporaries, Zephaniah and Habakkuk, facing the certain ruin of Judah, and the victorious power of Babylon, gives us another illustration of

[1] For the whole discussion see Dr. Peake's article "Immanuel," *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, vol. i. pp. 782–4.

[2] Isa. ix. 1–7; xi. 1–9.

[3] Isa. ix. 6.

the triumph of faith, and the unquenchable hope which no calamity was able to destroy.

Jeremiah, whose life has been described as "a Messianic life, filled on the one side with consecration to his Divine mission, and on the other with suffering caused by the persecution of those who did not respect the feelings of a peculiarly sensitive soul," supplies a distinct and definite contribution to the Messianic hope of Israel.

Possessed of an intensely spiritual nature, cultured in the school of suffering for the truth's sake, an ardent lover of humanity, it is not surprising to find the deep spiritual note running through all his teaching. And when it is remembered that he lived and worked amidst the ruin of Judah's external life, that he predicted and witnessed the final overthrow of Judah as a political and separate power, we can the more readily appreciate the distinctiveness and greatness of his work.

The old order had indeed passed for Jeremiah. The old covenant of external prohibitions and ceremonies had done its work. In the loss of its national life, Israel would discover the true religion, based on the inward relation and loyalty of the individual soul to God, and the "New Covenant" written in the heart. Therein God and Israel will enter into intimacies more personal, deeper, closer, more enduring.[1] It is round this doctrine of the New Covenant, looking as it does over the whole future of God's relation to man, that we find the value of Jeremiah's teaching.

[1] Jer. xxxi. 33, 34

Like Isaiah, he associated the inception of the new order with the royal house of David, using Isaiah's figure of the "branch," or "root."[1] Like Isaiah he regarded the royal city of the restored Jerusalem as the seat and centre of government,[2] while over a contented and happily united people "Yahweh-tsidkenu,"[3]—Yahweh is our righteousness—will reign.

Yet, while the Messianic hope and future is thus marked by the national bias, Jeremiah's conception of religion was too inward and spiritual to remain there, and, in parts of his writings, the universalism inherent in his thought breaks through, and he sings of the time when "nations shall come from the ends of the earth, . . . and they shall know that my name is Yahweh."[4]

Ezekiel shares with the second Isaiah, the distinction and honour of exercising the whole of his prophetic ministry outside his own land, being called to the prophetic office in the fifth year after his arrival in Babylon.[5] If it is true that the exile, while destroying the nation, saved religion, it is largely due to the loyalty, the genius, the unsparing devotion of Ezekiel during his twenty-two years of ministry.

Against the dark background of national overthrow and ruin, living as a prisoner in the world's capital of idolatry, derided and rejected by his fellow-countrymen, Ezekiel's victory over circum-

[1] Jer. xxiii. 5; xxx. 9; xxxiii. 15.
[2] Jer. xxxiii. 16, 17.
[3] Jer. xxxiii. 16.
[4] Jer. xvi. 19, 21. [5] Ezek. i. 1–5.

stances is a pattern and inspiration to every sufferer for the truth's sake.[1] He stands forth there as one of the world's noblest confessors! Defying his surroundings, and spite of them, he saved religion from being submerged by the prevailing heathenism, and rallied the scattered remnants of the true Israel by his glorious vision of the new Jerusalem, and the restored sanctuary "in the midst of them for evermore."[2]

Ezekiel, as a disciple of his great master and teacher, Jeremiah, develops the doctrine of the worth of the individual. Pre-exilic prophets, as we have seen, exalted the commonwealth of Israel as a whole. The individual mattered less. The nation was chief. Now that Israel as a nation was in ruins, such a view was impossible, hence the insistence upon the value of the unit. But, while holding with Jeremiah to the importance of personality, Ezekiel saw Israel once more as a saved community, gathered round a restored sanctuary as the central point of the new national life. What we have in his pages, is the picture of a true theocracy, whence should issue the river of healing and blessing, making everything to live whither it comes![3] This is the glowing vision, which remains even yet unfulfilled, and which alone keeps the world sweet and young!

It is under this ideal of the state as a "church," or as itself "a sanctuary," as the symbol of Yahweh's perpetual presence, that Ezekiel figures

[1] Ezek. xxxiii. 31, 32.
[2] Ezek. xxxvii. 26–28. [3] Ezek. xlvii. 9.

forth the Messianic hope of the exile. It is a noble ideal. The more so when we remember how vividly the exile reminded the people of their failure as a state or commonwealth, and that, on Ezekiel's horizon, there were no outward signs to encourage faith in the future! Even yet it is an ideal, though with the shattering of rival faiths and opposing autocracies everywhere, it is nearer to us in this twentieth century than we may think.

But for the time, the restored Judaism Ezekiel did so much to bring into being, failed, even as had the old, to realize the dream. Instead, it degenerated into the narrowest legalism, and ultimately into that Pharisaism which knew not the true Messiah when He came, and crucified Him. Yet there it stands even now in the pages of Ezekiel, a pattern and a hope!

In keeping with this, it is interesting to find, that while Ezekiel shares the general Messianic view, that the future of the nation is bound up with a "prince" of the house of David,[1] he lays far greater emphasis upon the idea of the Messiah as "the Good Shepherd" of His flock, caring for and ever seeking His own.[2] Out of this too, carrying as a true priest, the priestly solicitude, springs Ezekiel's insistence upon the responsibility of the watchman, or under-shepherd.[3] "If the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned, and the sword come, and take any person from among them; he is

[1] Ezek. xxxvii. 24, 25.
[2] Ezek. xxxiv. 11, 12. [3] Ezek. xxxiii. 1–9.

taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand." Speech has never yet, nor ever will, more worthily set forth the solemn greatness, the unspeakable glory of the pastoral care!

We cannot usefully pass on to examine the contribution of the second Isaiah, xl.–lv. and the section Isaiah lvi.–lxvi., to the development of the Messianic hope, without a word of explanation. It is now generally accepted that Isaiah xl.–lv., cannot be the work of Isaiah. It clearly belongs to the exile, and the author probably lived both in Babylon and in Jerusalem. Isaiah lvi.–lxvi. obviously belongs to a period later still. The temple, though not the walls of Jerusalem, has been rebuilt. While great, it is not sustained on the high level of the second Isaiah, and there is more of threatening than in the earlier exilic work.

It is significant that, though we have in Isaiah xl.–lv., the loftiest view of the future, yet, unlike all the other prophets, the author makes no reference to a future Messiah of the house of David. His theme is the greatness of God, and the future glory of Israel as the servant and messenger of God to man, as the prophet of God to the whole earth.[1]

To say that these chapters of comfort and consolation (Isaiah xl.–lv.), for beauty of thought and for true nobility of expression, are even yet unsurpassed in literature, is not to use the language of exaggeration. They are indeed, the permanent treasure-house of humanity. The more searching

[1] Isa. xlii. 1.

the examination, the more wonderful is the discovery of wealth. That they are to us anonymous in authorship, serves to heighten their wonder, and to deepen our gratitude to God, who raised up such a permanent comforter and teacher of the race.

The message of comfort springs from the experience of terrible suffering.[1] Written amid the scenes, and toward the end of bitter exile, with the near prospect of deliverance in the person of the Persian conqueror, Cyrus,[2]—"God's shepherd," or "anointed," the prophet brings to his afflicted people the word of cheer and hope. "The iniquity of Jerusalem is pardoned, she has received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."[3] Let Israel now look up, for surely his redemption draweth near.

From this the prophet proceeds to develop his distinctive teaching of Israel as the "suffering servant of Yahweh." Out of the scattered remnant of those, who, though smitten, sorely afflicted and tried, suffering even to death, God will yet raise up a "people who shall sing his praise from the end of the earth."[4] "The Servant," says Dr. Peake, "is not an ideal distinct from the nation, but the nation regarded from an ideal point of view."[5] And the nation, thus redeemed through suffering, becomes God's ambassador and herald to all the nations.[6] Israel reaches his crowning

[1] Isa. xl. 1. [2] Isa. xliv. 28.
[3] Isa. xl. 2. [4] Isa. xlii. 10.
[5] *Problem of Suffering*, p. 193.
[6] Isa. xliii. 1–4; xlv. 20–25.

mission of salvation for all peoples through the cross of death, and out of such sacrifice attains the victory of final conquest.[1]

And this unique and altogether wonderful statement of vicarious suffering is the more remarkable, when it is remembered that the Old Testament knows no doctrine of a suffering Messiah. As we have seen, the prophets associated the Messianic day with majesty, victory, and final supremacy; but such a day would come through life, not through death, through the triumph of righteousness that was truly mighty. Right on to New Testament times, neither prophecy nor apocalyptic associated the future King or Messiah with a life of humiliation and suffering, ending in death. The doctrine of the Cross was, to the Jews, "a stumbling-block."[2] So unlike the Messiah of prophecy, of teaching, of longing, such as the Jewish people had been led to expect, was Jesus, that, when He came, He was not recognized.[3] When He began to unfold to His disciples the necessity of His suffering and death, the men trained in Jewish lore and hope were stunned by the announcement,[4] while for Judas—the most Jewish of all the twelve—it was the final crash of all his hope, and decided his destiny as a traitor.[5]

The prophets from Isaiah onward, had laid stress upon the ideal King. "Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness."[6] The hope alternated between

[1] Isa. liii. 10–12. [2] 1 Cor. i. 23. [3] John i. 11.
[4] Matt. xvi. 21–23.
[5] John vi. 70; Mark xiv. 17–20; Matt. xxvi. 14–16.
[6] Isa. xxxii. 1.

the anticipation of an ideal future kingdom under the direct rule of God, and of the Messiah, the anointed of God, as His representative. As we pass to apocalyptic, and on to the Maccabean times of the second century B.C.—the golden age of the Maccabean house—we mark in the literature of the period an almost utter absence of the figure of the Davidic Messiah, such as had sustained the earlier prophets. The expectation now is that the Kingdom of God will be brought in through the priestly descent of the Maccabean family of Levi, the Messiah himself will come of the priestly house of Judas.

In the first century B.C. however, the high character of the Maccabees had fallen to the lowest and worst forms of moral corruption, and popular expectation relinquished the thought of a Messiah of priestly descent, and fell back on the earlier hope of the royal house of David. But, as might have been expected from such a corrupt and morally decadent people, the Messiah now looked for was a man of war, who would, with a "strong hand and a mighty arm" utterly destroy the hated Roman power, hold the nations of the world in awe, and make Jerusalem the praise of the whole earth.

Yet it remains true, that, while we may not claim that any prophet had before him in advance the picture of Jesus, it is only in the Royal Son of God—the Son of man—the great High Priest and Prophet of the world, that the Messianic hope of Israel is consummated and surpassed.

It is surely a true spiritual instinct and insight which ascribes to Jesus all, and far more, than the most glowing ideal of poet and seer ever descried. Before the glory of the "Sun of Righteousness," the stars of that promise by which Israel had been guided and sustained, pale into insignificance. Jesus so fulfilled the Old Testament picture, as to make every part of it increasingly precious.

At the same time, He so transcended it, as to be unrecognized by the legitimate guardians of the hope they inherited from the best of their race. He was indeed "the Messiah," who, "when he is come, will declare unto us all things,"[1] yet so unlike, so much more than their best hopes, as to be the "despised and rejected of men." "Here we have the historical key to the tragedy of the Gospels, the mental and moral unpreparedness of the chosen people for God's Anointed, which deepened into refusal to advance to the venture of faith in Him on the simple self-evidence of the spiritual quality and power of His message and Person."[2]

Jesus unites in His own unique personality every feature of the ancient hope of His race after the flesh. He is all that prophetic revelation declared would mark the future of Israel and Israel's relation to the world. But He is immeasurably more and different. He is more than the Messiah of prophecy, acting for God as the "Anointed One." He is indeed "The Incarnate God," the Divine head and centre of His own kingdom, making member-

[1] John iv. 25. [2] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 637.

ship in it to consist of living relationship to His Person, declaring itself in loyalty to His will.

The difference, explaining the blindness of Israel, and the temporary rejection by "His own," is to be found in the spirituality of His method and aim, with its notes of equality and universality.

He is a Warrior, but His fight is against evil. He is a Conqueror, but His conquests are primarily in the realms of affection, disposition, and conduct. All other victories follow these. He is a King, and brings in a Kingdom, but His sovereignty is other and more enduring than any material greatness, or than any visible centre could possibly enshrine. He is Servant of all and Sufferer for all. In that and through it, He ascends His throne, ruling evermore in the City which is itself His temple, in the glory and worship and service of which, the redeemed "go no more out."

(4) The persistence and growth of this Messianic hope, while meaning so much more for the world than those who cherished it and passed it on, could ever know, carried in it also a mission of priceless value to Israel. The religions of the world offer no parallel. As we pursue the study of it, we are conscious of that Holy Presence, which led Moses in awe and wonder to say, "I will turn aside now, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt."[1] For purposes now made clear in the world-embracing teaching and work of Jesus, we find in it the explanation and the irresistible proof of God's patient education of Israel.

[1] Exod. iii. 3.

"The real moment of a nation's greatness is when it has a noble heroic past, and yet looks forward to a great living future. So long as prophecy was alive in Israel, the past had real meaning and the future was full of hope. It is a striking thing, the significance of which we do well to ponder, that when Judaism rejected Jesus there was no more real growth. The possessions from the past were carefully preserved and mechanically copied, commentaries enlarged and rules multiplied; all this carried to wearisome lengths and ridiculous refinements, but no real creative force or divine inspiration."[1]

Israel's victorious faith in the future was Israel's salvation. Rising again and again on faith's wings to this dream-world of hope, her loftiest sons and daughters were at rest in the midst of great upheavals, and were able to preach the gospel of real strength, through the reliance of a quiet and confident waiting upon God. What incentive it offered to effort, even when the situation seemed the most hopeless! What a motive it supplied for loyalty, seeing that God has purposes for His people so glorious! What a training in faith and spirituality, as over against the sordid conditions of their own time, and the material greatness upon which Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and Persia relied! God would never forsake His people. Let them only be loyal to Him, and they were for ever safe.

This was the rock-like faith and this the un-

[1] Prof. Jordan, *Prophetic Ideas and Ideals*, p. 156.

ceasing burden of the prophets. In the present broken condition of the world, it is still the only worthy and redeeming Gospel! For it is deeply and permanently true that we are saved by our hopes and by our faith![1] If we are resting in the achievements of our yesterdays, or in the actual possessions of to-day, we are absorbing our capital, we are facing bankruptcy in the future.

And this serves to make clear another truth of intrinsic and abiding value in this study of the forward look of Israel. As we pass from the dark days of Israel's exile and return, the ministry of warning, of judgment and retribution, which is the chief characteristic of pre-exilic prophecy, we come to the ministry of hope, of comfort and encouragement, which is the distinctive feature of the second Isaiah, of Haggai and Zechariah.

This word of comfort and hope indeed, had been often sung into the dull and heavy ears of Israel, but it is only as Israel enters her Gethsemane, and through it faces her Olivet, that it finds its clearest and noblest expression. "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God."[2]

It is the pre-figuring of a truth which finds its highest illustration in Jesus, and is for us found only in the joyous secret of companionship with Him. He faced His Gethsemane under the strengthening or comforting ministry of song.[3] It was under the impending shadow of the greatest loss, that

[1] Rom. viii. 24; Eph. ii. 8.
[2] Isa. xl. 1.
[3] Matt. xxvi. 30.

He spoke as He had never done before, of "His joy."[1]

While even now, amid the prevalence of evil, and the delay of His kingdom, we are comforted —girded for service—as we still maintain the forward look, believing in the greater to-morrows of the world, constantly "looking for the blessed hope, and appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ,"[2] whose ever widening victory, "according to His promise, will establish "the new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."[3]

[1] John xv. 11; xvi. 20, 21, 22, 24; xvii. 13.
[2] Titus ii. 13. [3] 2 Peter iii. 13.

CHAPTER VI.

The Prophet and Reform in Israel.

WE have already considered[1] the ministry and work of the Hebrew prophets as revealers and interpreters of that truth by which man truly lives,[2] and the deep and abiding obligation under which they have placed the world, for that sacred deposit of spiritual treasure by which its real life has been permanently enriched.

In lifting and leading the thought of their time, in giving it ideal as well as direction, in sustaining hope and supplying it with motive and reason, they did an incomparable service, not only to their own, but to every subsequent age. Had this been their only contribution to the sum total of the world's good, or did it constitute their chief claim upon our gratitude and study, we could not afford to ignore them.

Truth and justice require us to affirm, that, as supplying the strength and the safeguard of eternal principles, as laying down the permanent bases of conduct, the prophets still point the way for the idealists of the world, they remain among our surest

[1] See pp. 79-100. [2] Deut. viii. 3; Matt. iv. 4.

and most competent guides. Their thoughts still live and burn. Their faith and hope abide. For the unprecedented difficulties of our twentieth century, intensified by the world-upheaval of the European war, the literature of the prophets is our best modern text-book, they speak the message our own age most needs to hear and heed.

For this newer, and, as we believe, more accurate interpretation of the Hebrew prophet and his work, we are indebted to the modern method of historical investigation and inquiry. The older dogmatic, allegorical, and often fanciful method of interpreting the prophet, tended to remove him from any absorbing interest in his own people or time, and made him a visionary, an idealist, whose work lay chiefly in descrying the history and destiny of distant generations and centuries, even down to the detailed events of the late European war!

Now however, in the light of a careful, historic study of their words and writings, it is impossible any longer to argue for such a view, or to hold it. And indeed, such a judgment, so far from honouring the place and work of the prophet, does him a very serious injustice. It implies at least partial indifference to the movements of his own time, and so removes him from the position of influence—now of hope, now of fear—he undoubtedly filled among his own people. He knew the future. He never hesitated to declare his knowledge. But this was because he was such a close and careful student of the present, and had grasped with such

keen moral sympathy the eternal principles and laws of human conduct, which, being eternal, act with constant and unerring aim.

I.

It is then from this point of view, and particularly remembering the practical purpose of these studies for those who are still set as "God's forth-tellers," that we approach this further examination of the prophet's work.

1. The prophets did far more than project an ideal before their people. They declared a definite programme of daily practice. They urged the delights of duty. They rang the changes upon the sanctities, the obligations, the simple necessity of the word "ought," a word everywhere found and understood, aside from locality, race, or language, because embedded in the very structure of the human soul. They set the moral pace, and became the incarnate conscience of, and for their people. No cowards were these speakers of old. Neither fear of man, nor dread of consequences could bribe them into silence. They met in turn criticism, misrepresentation, ridicule, abuse, persecution and incredible suffering, but nothing was allowed to soften their speech concerning wrong-doing, nor weaken the boldness of their testimony to the truth they knew.

2. Nor must we fail to mark the note of urgency under which they spoke and wrote. They gladly surrendered their freedom to the pressure of Divine

guidance, and, as those commandeered of God, they found their liberty in bondage to the Divine will. Like Him whose heralds they were, they had "a baptism to be baptized with," being "straitened till it was accomplished."[1] Hence their delightful sincerity and singleness of aim. Hence too, their unfailing courage and untiring enthusiasm in service. As for their passion for righteousness, it consumed them. The word in their hearts was as a burning fire shut up in their bones, and they could not contain.[2] This gave to their message conviction, eagerness, tone, the authority of those who received their commission direct from God.

3. In keeping with this, and as serving to explain it, is the range and sweep of their reforming zeal. They covered the entire field of human relationship and conduct. A close examination of their writings reveals an intimate knowledge, alike of human nature and human activity. They were skilled physicians of the soul. So thoroughly did they understand the working of the human heart, and so accurate is their analysis of human motive and conduct, that they supply valuable material to the psychologist. In this particular, the preacher of to-day will find the prophets and the study of their methods, a fruitful source of illustration.

The modern student of ethical and social science is surprised to discover how complete is their programme of duty. Even amid the complications of our twentieth-century civilization, it is difficult

[1] Luke xii. 50. [2] Jer. xx. 9.

to detect any omission, as it is certainly impossible to revise their broad moral judgment. Knowing no class themselves, they addressed in turn every section of the nation, and neither feared, nor ignored, nor spared any. Anticipating Mazzini, the Italian patriot and prophet, each of the prophets of Israel could have truly said :—" Whatever concerns man, interests me." Nothing was alien to them that touched the good of their fellow-man. The loftiness of their view of God as " One loving righteousness," inspired and trained a lofty ideal of human attainment, nor was the standard ever lowered, nor the pressure of its insistence ever relaxed.

4. The possession of these qualities lifted the prophets far beyond the mere politicians and counsellors of the court and the nation. They knew nothing of the modern doggerel, " My country, right or wrong." They were patriots without being partisans. In the whole range of universal history, patriotism has no finer illustration or setting than the pictures :—

(1) Of Isaiah, voluntarily accepting the indignity of appearing for the course of three years[1] in the streets of his native Jerusalem, " naked and barefoot,"[2] in order to arouse the public conscience of his people against the policy of an Egyptian alliance, advocated and encouraged by the statesmen of his day.

(2) Or of Jeremiah, described so well by Dr. Peake as one " whose heart was so exquisitely fitted

[1] Isa. xx. 3 [2] Isa. xx. 2.

for love, and to whom a home would have been a welcome refuge from the scorn and cruelty of his fellows, doomed to a life of loneliness uncheered by wife or children."[1] Yet Jeremiah accepts the Divine decree, and, loving his nation well, and longing to save his people, in the hope that they would repent and return, he deliberately breaks the earthen bottle in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, as a token of the destruction about to break up his beloved Jerusalem and Judah.[2]

The explanation of it all is, that they loved their people and their land the more, that they loved God most of all. They believed in the destiny of their nation, but always as an instrument of blessing to others, not as an end in itself. And though it is not to be expected that they should possess the international mind and outlook of the better conscience of our twentieth century, surely the germ of it is in the logic of their teaching. We hear the coming music of the universal Gospel in the exile song and invitation of the prophet:— "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is none else. By myself have I sworn, the word is gone forth from my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."[3]

Happy the nation whose preachers and guides carry a similar range of vision, and whose patriotism is equally unselfish and unrestrained!

[1] Jer. xvi. 2. *Jeremiah*, Century Bible, vol. i. p. 15.
[2] Jer. xix. 1–10. [3] Isa. xlv. 22–23.

II.

The conditions of the time created the need, and supplied the opportunity for the reforming zeal of the prophet. We have already incidentally referred to the changes brought about in Israel by the transference from the nomadic to the settled stages of their life, following the conquest and partition of Canaan,[1] and particularly following the division of the kingdom under Jeroboam.

If we are rightly to appraise the place of the prophet as a reformer, or to realize the clamant and growing cry for reform, it will be necessary to watch this development at closer range, and trace its effect upon the national temper and *morale*. An accompanying advantage of this study will be, that we shall be touching tendencies closely affecting our own time, and always calling for the prophet's vigilance, insight, and courage.

With the end of David's rule—always the ideal of Hebrew hope—there passed for ever the older patriarchal and tribal system under which Israel's entrance into, and conquest of Canaan, had been established. So long as the kingdom was one, the family bond of the nation was, to some extent maintained. The administration of justice remained uncorrupted as in the patriarchal days. The costs of government, and the conditions of social life were moderate and simple. The paternal and personal interest of the king enabled him to be regarded as the father of his people.

[1] See pp. 47–50.

But with Solomon, and especially with the imperialism, pride, and extravagance of his later years, all this was brought to an end. The old yeoman and farmer classes were either starved out, or bought up by a courtier and commercial section, growing ever more wealthy and arrogant. With this serfdom began in Israel, leading to a terrible oppression of the poor. It is easy to understand therefore, why Solomon, from being the idol and the pride of his people, should pass unhonoured and without regret, leaving the seeds of revolution among those whose loyalty it would have been easy to preserve.

Under his successor, Rehoboam, things went rapidly from bad to worse. Instead of easing burdens, and seeking to win his people, he imposed an ever-increasing burden of taxation, and gave revolution its opportunity. Enormous sums of money, needed for crying reform, were lavishly expended by later kings upon the adornment of the royal capitals of Tirzah and Samaria. And this example of wicked luxury was copied by the wealthy, lolling "on their beds of ivory,"[1] and living at ease in the security of their palaces of Samaria.[2]

Until the startling appearance of Amos, who, with an Elijah-like suddenness and boldness exposed the actual condition of things, an outside observer would have said all was well with Israel. Trade with foreign countries was booming. Towns were springing up everywhere. As in England

[1] Amos vi. 4. [2] Amos vi. 1.

in the years immediately preceding the close of the war—1916–1918—and for eighteen months following the Armistice, so in Israel in the days of Amos, signs of wealth, prosperity, abundance, were everywhere.

But, as is always the case when material wealth is regarded as the end of life, appearances were terribly deceptive. And, as should always be the case, the actual conditions, as against the apparent, were made known by God's prophets. In the light of their vivid and glowing pages, we see "a people festering with social sores; cruelty and inhuman oppression, extortion and injustice were practised upon every one who was not strong enough to maintain his rights for himself; the feasts of Yahweh were the scenes of excess and indulgence of every kind; His priests and prophets were among the worst offenders. And yet, in spite of this wholesale immorality, the nation was devoted to Yahweh, and all the externals of religion, ritual, offerings, and festivals, were kept up with great magnificence."[1]

We hear Amos describing how the nobles live in fine mansions, and fare sumptuously every day, reclining on couches of ivory and cushions of silk.[2] Yet these are the men who "have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes; that pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and lay themselves down beside every altar upon clothes taken in pledge."[3] They "swallow

[1] Hamilton; *The People of God*, vol. i. p. 54.
[2] Amos iii. 12; vi. 4–6. [3] Amos ii. 6–8.

up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail, saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the Sabbath that we may set forth wheat? making the ephah small, and the shekel great, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit; that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the refuse of the wheat."[1]

Nor was this shocking condition of things peculiar to the Northern Kingdom, nor even to the earlier prophets of the eighth century. Micah complains that in Judah, the heads of Jacob "pluck off their skin from off them, and their flesh from off their bones; who also eat the flesh of my people; and they flay their skin from off them, and break their bones; yea, they chop them in pieces, as for the pot, and as flesh within the caldron."[2]

"Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, that abhor judgement and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money."[3]

A hundred years later, when Jeremiah prophesied, things had not improved. This enables us to measure the enormous task the prophets undertook as the reformers of Israel. What stronger evidence is needed as to the general corruption of the nation? Especially when we remember, that

[1] Amos viii. 4–6. [2] Micah iii. 2–3.
[3] Micah iii. 9–11.

this denial of elementary morality was exalted into a religion, and existed side by side with the most elaborate ritual!

The pages of Jeremiah are filled with his exposure of social wrongs:—"For among my people are found wicked men: they watch, as fowlers lie in wait; they set a trap, they catch men. As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit; therefore they are become great, and waxen rich. They are waxen fat, they shine; yea, they overpass in deeds of wickedness: they plead not the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they should prosper, and the right of the needy do they not judge."[1]

Yet it is all done under a pretence of religious zeal, and as though, because they kept up a show of sacrifice and observance, God will condone immorality, even as an ordinary Semite deity would! So Jeremiah again and again warns them:—"Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these. Will ye steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense unto Baal, and walk after other gods whom ye have not known, and come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered; that ye may do all these abominations?"[2]

[1] Jer. v. 26, 28; xxi. 12; xxii. 3, 13, 16, 17.
[2] Jer. vii. 4, 9, 10.

III.

This general and rapid survey of the prevailing low ethical standards of the eighth, seventh, and sixth centuries before Christ, enables us the better to understand and appreciate the passionate earnestness, the vehemence, the reforming zeal of the Hebrew prophet. What they witnessed touched them to the quick. It stirred them to a white heat of moral indignation. It rendered them entirely indifferent to questions of personal position or safety. The apparent hopelessness of the situation as they saw it, lay in the fact, that while the people as a whole were indifferent to moral distinctions, they were excessive in their enthusiasm for religion, and especially for the ritual of religion.

Outrageous wrong and cruel injustice were condoned if only they sacrificed enough, and paid their religious dues. The only distinction between Yahweh and the deities of other nations the majority of the people either understood or cared for, was, that Yahweh was their national God. He was to them precisely what Chemosh was to Moab, so that the same religious means and even the same immoral conduct which secured the favour of Chemosh for Moab, ought to win Yahweh's favour toward them. And so long as they gave to Yahweh, their God, what other peoples gave to their deities, Yahweh would be satisfied, and what mattered anything beside?

Out of a corrupt and corrupting theology, a lofty ethic can never come. To rail against theology,

or in any way to lessen and despise it, in order to exalt morality on the plea that it is "practical," is as philosophically false as it is ethically ruinous. The morals of Israel were bad, because their view of God was low. Nor was this debased and debasing idea of God peculiar to the rank and file of the people. The pages of the prophets conclusively prove that it was shared by kings, priests, and even the official prophets, to whom quite naturally the people turned for guidance.

Amaziah the priest of Bethel, was the first to attempt to silence the fearless Amos.[1] Hosea complains of the priests of the Northern Kingdom:— "Ye have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor."[2] "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so the company of priests murder in the way toward Shechem, yea, they have committed lewdness."[3]

In Judah, Micah charges upon the "heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel," that "they abhor judgement and pervert all equity. They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money; yet will they lean upon Yahweh, and say, Is not Yahweh in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us."[4]

The pages of Jeremiah are full of the same story of moral treachery on the part of those who

[1] Amos vii. 10–17. [2] Hosea v. 2. [3] Hosea vi. 9.
[4] Micah iii. 9–11.

should have been the first to give him encouragement.

Pashhur the priest "smote Jeremiah the prophet," and added insult to injury by putting him in the stocks.[1] Twice was the life of the prophet sought; once by his own townsmen of Anathoth,[2] and once by the priests and prophets.[3] Jehoiakim the king burnt the roll of Jeremiah's prophecies and sought to lay hands on the prophet himself.[4]

What more terrible evidence of the moral degradation of Israel's leaders could be supplied than the charge of Jeremiah against them?—"As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests and their prophets; which say to a stock, Thou art my father; and to a stone, Thou hast brought me forth."[5]

So completely were moral judgments perverted and degraded, that, knowing they were lying and glorying in it, they deliberately deceived the people, crying, "Peace, peace; when there is no peace,"[6] inciting to the wrong of silencing one, whom in their hearts they knew to be true. "Come and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us smite him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words."[7]

[1] Jer. xx. 1, 2. [2] Jer. xi. 18–23. [3] Jer. xxvi. 11.
[4] Jer. xxxvi. 23–26. [5] Jer. ii. 26, 27. [6] Jer. vi. 14.
[7] Jer. xviii. 18.

What hope could there be for leaders so indifferent to elemental questions of right and wrong? What prospect, save suffering and disappointment for a people, whose very religion was a degradation and a shame?

It is just here that the true greatness and the saving ministry of the Hebrew prophet shines forth. But for the prophet the people of Israel must have shared the final ruin and oblivion of the heathen peoples of Assyria, Babylon, Egypt and Persia. What else could they expect? They were as immoral. Their religion was almost, if not quite, as degraded. They had willingly followed their leaders, whose teaching of Yahweh, their God, was no higher than the teaching of the prophets who belonged to the "Baals" of surrounding nations. What could avert the same fate?

Only the abounding grace of that God whom they so little understood, whose grace had been abundantly proved in sending to them, through a long succession, fearless, discerning men, passionately loving righteousness and truth, and who, knowing the consequences of wrong-doing, "shrank not from declaring the whole counsel of God."[1]

The prophets saw that the persistent disobedience of Israel could end only in calamity and overthrow. They grieved over it. They sought to avert it, even as Moses entreated Pharaoh for the deliverance of his people. "Rising up early and saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate,"[2] the

[1] Acts xx. 27. [2] Jer. xliv. 4.

prophets, while not able to prevent the ruin of the nation, saved religion itself, because they persisted in declaring a lofty and worthy view of God.

It is in this noble presentation of Yahweh as a God of Character, that the religion of Israel stands alone and supreme. This is indeed the secret of its persistence and ultimate triumph. And the honour of discerning it and compelling its recognition, belongs to the prophets. It was this view of God which saved them from being mere visionaries and idealists. They had no option but to declare the exceeding righteousness of God, a righteousness, "able to declare unto man what is his thought,"[1] a righteousness, that, hating deception and pretence, always sought some practical and worthy result.

As a summary of its demands, the quiet dignity and solemn beauty of Isaiah's eloquence remains unmatched :—"To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts? Bring me no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; new moon and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. And when

[1] Amos iv. 13.

ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you; yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood.

"Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do well; seek judgement, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."[1]

Such a morality and religion as is there taught may be rejected. But no rejection, though it may delay, can prevent its final coronation.

IV.

In the light of this examination, we shall not be surprised to discover the thoroughness and completeness of the moral range of the prophets. Coming to them as it did, from the heights of communion with God, their teaching swept the entire circle of human relationship and human duty.

In this—as should always be the case with God's prophets—they were far above and beyond their time. So much is this the case, that only their intense spirituality, the closeness and constancy of their communion with God, the absolute capture of their affection by God, explains it.

Apart from this, we have a break in history without precedent or parallel! How else can it be understood? These men were of like passions with ourselves, susceptible as we are to environment, to custom, to the prevailing habit and view-

[1] Isa. i. 11–17.

point of their age. Moreover, they were Easterns, children of heredity and climate, excitable, with tendencies to clannishness and narrowness, yet here, in their ethical teaching, they stride away beyond any known or conceivable standard, urging a method of life, which, even for our twentieth century world, fixes a standard and sets a pace we may well covet to attain!

Again, let us repeat—for the insistence is for us essential—the character and sweep of their ethic draws its inspiration from the loftiness and purity of their theology. What option had they who knew and loved a God "of purer eyes than to behold evil,"[1] and that cannot look on "iniquity," but to denounce it in any and every form? The whole truth of the matter is well stated by Prof. Jordan:—"For the first time in the history of the world we find what we call "social morality" presented in the highest expression of the religious life, and this is done with remarkable clearness and boldness in the name of Israel's God."[2]

It is then, in this study of the prophets as passionate preachers of righteousness, rather than as foretellers of the future, that we find their truest message, not only to their own, but to every succeeding age. This is why, "being dead, they yet speak." This is why, being so modern, they should be the close and constant companions of those who are called to declare "the mind of Christ."[3] For the wrongs they pilloried are still our shame. The tendencies against which they entreated and

[1] Hab. i. 13. [2] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 89 [3] 1 Cor. ii. 16.

warned are our danger still. Their exposure of the selfish greed and scandalous oppression of the poor under the cover of religious zeal and sanctity, is an urgent demand of our own time, seeing that it is constantly "crucifying the Son of God afresh,"[1] and still affords the enemies of the Cross occasion to blaspheme. The ideal so worthily set forth for Israel by one of the loftiest of their order, even yet expresses the purpose of that Kingdom for which we work and wait:—"Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever; the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified."[2]

(1) An examination of the pages of the prophets reveals the modernness of these ancient preachers of righteousness. It enables us to understand how closely they touched the life of their people, how thoroughly they knew and understood their time, and how accurately they set forth the working of the human heart.

It is a mistake to suppose that they were content merely to denounce wrong-doing. They did this, it is true, without fear, and entirely without respect of persons. And their condemnation covers the whole category of human sin. "There is nought but swearing and breaking faith, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery,"[3] says the tender-hearted Hosea. "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the understanding."[4] "How is the faithful city become an harlot," cries Isaiah, "she that was full of judgement, righteous-

[1] Heb. vi. 6. [2] Isa. lx. 21. [3] Hosea iv. 2. [4] Hosea iv. 11.

ness lodged in her, but now murderers."[1] The pages of Amos,[2] Micah,[3] and the later prophets Jeremiah,[4] Zechariah,[5] and Ezekiel,[6] are full of accusation, and unsparingly they expose the moral degradation of the nation.

(2) But they were much more than the moral censors and judges of their people and their time. They sought to be the moral guides and supply the true standard of life. If, by letting down the plumb-line of their loftier code, they condemned the existing structure, they as earnestly, with an affection and a patience that never wearied, assisted such as were willing to heed, in uprearing a structure far more beautiful and enduring.

(3) They taught the "humanness of God," in that He was far more concerned that they should be upright and true, considerate and generous to their fellows, than that they should imagine Him to be satisfied or appeased with mere burnt-offerings and empty ritual.[7] Implicit in this teaching was the truth of human brotherhood, even though—as might have been expected—it was the brotherhood of Israelitish men. Yet, once stated, it was impossible it should end there. The brotherhood of all men was concealed in the acorn of this truth.

(4) So also the modern, and, as it is now called, the democratic teaching of equality of opportunity, was latent in their insistent demand for social

[1] Isa. i. 21. [2] Amos iii. 10; viii. 5.
[3] Micah ii. 11; iii. 10; vi. 10, 11.
[4] Jer. vii. 6, 9; ix. 2; xxii. 17; xix. 4.
[5] Zech. v. 3, 4, 8. [6] Ezek. ix. 9; xi. 6, 7; xxii. 23–30.
[7] Amos v. 14, 15, 21–24; Isa. i. 14.

justice, and their vehement denunciation of oppression on the part of the outwardly rich.[1] Outside Israel such a demand was not only unheard of, it was unthinkable. Only as we remember this contrast, can we adequately measure the moral superiority of the teaching of the prophets.

And it is only as we keep this teaching before the thought of our own generation, that we shall discover the true adjustments of capital and labour. In his seventh lecture to the students of Yale University, Sir G. A. Smith argues with irresistible force, that when and where the historic study of the prophets has been neglected, ethical teaching has been pushed into the background. Whenever interest in such study has revived, "it has invariably been accompanied by the application of religion to every human relation, and to all human conduct."[2]

The surest way to a speedy and permanent settlement of the present industrial suspicion and unrest, will be found in urging, as the prophets urged, the doctrine of reciprocal duties as well as reciprocal rights, and equality of opportunity in the sight of God.

(5) Nor, in seeking the ideal state, as embodying the noblest patriotism, did the prophets shrink from the work of rebuking and counselling the sovereigns and the statesmen of their day. Purity in governors and in government was for them, the true expression of religion, and the only patriotism

[1] Amos ii. 11, 12; Isa. i. 17.
[2] *Modern Criticism and the Preaching of the O.T.*, p. 215.

worth fighting for. They would neither have been deterred nor deceived by the timid cry:—"No politics in religion." They would have regarded it as compromising with iniquity, and the patching up of a false peace.

The long and agonizing contest of Isaiah with the wicked Ahaz, and with the short-sighted statesmen of Jerusalem, who counselled unholy alliances with Assyria or with Egypt; the faithful and oft-repeated "interference" of Jeremiah during the fateful years of the later monarchy, are outstanding samples of a long line of witnesses, who, with an Elijah-like fearlessness, placed country before personal comfort, love of truth before thought of ease, and the honour and service of God before all. In so doing, they were the true builders of Empire. And in such work, they are the models of all who seek to build the City of God.

(6) Against the dark background of a world and society polygamous and grossly immoral, the prophets always insisted upon the solemnity and sacredness of the marriage tie, the sanctity and purity of family life. The exquisitely drawn picture of Hosea, is one of the masterpieces of literature. All the more, that it is revealed entirely for vicarious reasons, as enforcing the sacredness of Israel's bond, as the chosen bride of God. Far more effective than any oracle, as guarding the sanctity of the home, is the example of the tender-hearted Hosea, through the shame and sadness of his own darkened dwelling, illustrating the tragedy of broken nuptial vows, and showing,

through his own unfailing love and repeated forgiveness, the mercy and grace of Him who longed to win back to purity and honour the Israel He so dearly loved!

The generally lofty standard of family life among the Jewish people through all the centuries, has been often extolled as at once a pattern and a pride. How could it be otherwise, when, through all their history they had listened to teaching so well stated by the anonymous Malachi :—

"The Lord hath been witness between thee and the wife of thy youth."[1] In the presence of that estimate of the marriage relation, the modern tendency to weaken the obligations of the marriage vow, to make divorce cheap and easy, stands smitten and condemned. No nation can survive the lowering of family life, or indifference to the purity of the home.

To sum up. These great teachers of Israel served their generation faithfully and well. They were too great indeed for their own time rightly to appraise them. They spoke to their own people, and there were some who heard and understood. Through this faithful "remnant," though the nation was lost, the true religion was saved.

In the light of our later knowledge, and with the truer perspective secured to us by the intervening centuries, it is for us to pray that we may not repeat the folly of those who ignored, or mocked, and refused the witness of these faithful men. "Being dead, they yet speak." For they had

[1] Mal. ii. 10–16.

laid hold of the eternal things. They declared truths, which, being eternal, are for us and for all men, until the last syllable of recorded time. The real message of the prophets will never grow old.

"While swings the sea, while mists the mountains shroud,
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,
Still at the prophet's feet the nations sit."[1]

[1] Lowell, *Bibliolatres*, p. 132.

PART II.

THE MODERN PREACHER.

"THE Prophets are not improved off the face of the earth. They never will be. They will turn up again and again.

You can no more hope to exterminate them by culture, than you can hope to produce them by machinery. You have written about these people: There are no prophets now. It's all old-world talk. There never will be any more. No more prophets! The prophetical function never stops. Never will stop."

Jessopp: *The Coming of the Friars.*

CHAPTER VII.

The Supremacy of Jesus.

"GOD, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets, . . . hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son."[1] In such suggestive and conclusive speech, the writer of one of the most precious portions of the New Testament sums up the authority of the Old, and introduces the greater and final authority of the New.

Behind both revelations there moves the eternal purpose, and the redeeming love of God, consecrating the organ of speech as the instrument by which He will achieve the ultimate salvation of the world. It stamps the function of preaching—the declaring of the mind and heart of God—with a distinctiveness and a value unshared and unwasting.

In keeping with this noble and dignified statement of the Divine movement toward men, is the declaration of the evangelists, that "Jesus came preaching the Gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand: Repent ye, and believe in the Gospel."[2]

[1] Heb. i. 1.
[2] Mark i. 14, 15; Matt. iv. 17, 23; ix. 35; Luke iv. 18, 19.

Thus did our Lord—alike the Founder and the Substance of His Gospel—in His own example and method, establish the vocation of the preacher, and set His Divine seal to the prophetic (forth-telling) order of conveying eternal truth. Jesus commences with preaching. He did not argue for it, nor discuss an alternative. It is clearly to Him the essential and the obvious, and His action is at once authoritative, universal, and final.

In these later days, when there is a tendency to ignore, or to minimize the place of the preacher, and the value of the spoken word, setting over against it as in competition, the power of the pen, or the appeal of the picture—as though either could at some time become a substitute—we do well to mark carefully the significance of the Divine example.

Remembering who Jesus was, the nature and sweep of His vision and claim, the permanence of the Kingdom He came to establish, it is inconceivable that His quiet assumption of the method of preaching, can be accepted as an accommodation to a particular time or people, or as something to be set aside at any later age, in favour of a method more effective still.

We must believe that He deliberately selected the best and final means of making known the Eternal Mind and Purpose, and that His pattern remains for ever as the norm and law of His Church. On a question so vital as the method of propaganda, the practice of Jesus becomes the permanent law

of Divine ministry, and seals the function of preaching with supreme and permanent authority. It is further noticeable, that, leaving nothing else in the way of church organization, preaching is one of the few things for which He made provision, as He faced the future.[1]

1. We shall be in a position to estimate more accurately the value of Jesus' method and example, if we briefly glance at the world into which He came. Religion in Israel had become formal, pedantic, a burden "grievous to be borne."[2] Its interpretation belonged exclusively to a professional class who demanded "such respect to their sayings, that they were to be absolutely believed, even if they were to declare that to be at the right hand, which was at the left, or *vice versa*."[3]

In their origin indeed, the "Scribes" contributed a most necessary and valuable service to the community. It must never be forgotten that we owe to them, in great part, the preservation of the precious documents of the Old Testament. The student of this history stands in reverent awe as he watches the brooding Spirit of God, raising up and endowing in those far-away, dark times, patriots like Nehemiah, and men of letters like Ezra, so that the priceless heritage of lawgiver, prophet and singer, forming the chief part of the sacred canon, may not be lost.

[1] Mark vi. 7–12; Luke ix. 1–6; Matt. xxviii. 16–20; 1 Cor. i. 17, 18, 21–24.
[2] Matt. xxiii. 4; Luke xi. 46.
[3] Edersheim's *Life and Times of Jesus*, vol. i. p. 94.

Ezra—spoken of as a "ready scribe in the law of Moses,"[1] having "set his heart to seek the law of the Lord and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments,"[2]—stands as among the first and best of a great succession. For two hundred years or more these scholars—the "wise," the "men of understanding" of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes—were employed in copying, editing, and interpreting the sacred documents, thus assisting the cause of permanent religion, and acting as a defence against the national tendency to decline.

But gradually, during the Greek period, and particularly under the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, the Scribes became mere legalists and jurists, concerned entirely with the letter, caring nothing for the spirit of the law.

The testimony of so scholarly, and yet so truly Jewish a writer as Montefiore, is significant and final, and enables us to see the process which led to the deplorable decay of religion in the first century of our era:—"Because the law was in great part a written code, and few possessed it, it needed oral explanations. Laws needed other laws, ordinances required ordinances. Explanation and exemplification, instances and illustrations, produced fresh commandments. The law said that no work was to be done upon the Sabbath. But what was work? Human ingenuity made elaborate—painfully, foolishly elaborate—determinations and definitions of work. So one simple

[1] Ezra vii. 6. [2] Ezra vii. 10.

prohibition ended in many detailed and sometimes ludicrous prohibitions. This process, too, was going on when Jesus lived and looked forth with His clear and penetrating eye upon the religious life around Him. The Judaism of the first century was, therefore, a "legal" religion, and its "legalism" was on the increase."[1]

If we turn to look at the world of learning outside Judaism, we mark the same absence of either the prophetic insight, sincerity or speech. Like the religious world, philosophy, research, the quest of truth, had become formal, lost in words, caring nothing for reality.

The more serious and highly moral schools of Grecian thought, which had marked the teaching of Plato and Socrates in the fourth century before Christ, had given place to the useless and even foolish discussions of men utterly unworthy of the seats they occupied in Athens and Alexandria. We see at a glance the frivolous, cynical, superficial life of Athens—formerly the world's chief seat of learning—in the striking comment of Luke, as he describes the typical Athenian of his day:—"Now all the Athenians and the strangers sojourning there spent all their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing."[2] No wonder that such superficiality "mocked"[3] the serious spirit and profound learning of Paul, and knew no better than to speak of him as a "babbler."[4]

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 620.
[2] Acts xvii. 21. [3] Acts xvii. 32. [4] Acts xvii. 18.

2. To this world of unreality—the ceaseless hair-splitting of the scribe, and the wordy, but useless discussions of the wise—Jesus came preaching, telling forth in speech of exquisite simplicity and earnestness, and with unparalleled "authority," the thoughts of God upon everything that vitally concerned man.

And He did it in such a way that the better thought, and the deeper consciousness alike of the individual and of the nation—factors always to be reckoned with, and constituting the basis of human appeal—awaking to reality once more, associated Him with the Messianic ideal of long centuries as "that Prophet,"[1] or still more definitely, with two prophets, Elijah and Jeremiah,[2] honoured and revered as among their noblest and best.

It was a worthy tribute, not only to the outstanding position of the prophets, but to the surpassing greatness of Jesus, who, reviving the prophetic method of telling forth Divine things, at the same time so enlarged and crowned their work, as to combine in His own unique personality their distinctive qualities. While He so completed and fulfilled their varied ministry, that a later seer is able to write with absolute truth, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."[3]

3. The practice of Jesus, let us repeat, sufficiently indicates and establishes His intention. His method sets forth the enduring order. He did not ignore the written word. During the long

[1] John iv. 25, 26; John i. 21.
[2] Matt. xvi. 14. [3] Rev. xix. 10.

years of quiet training in Nazareth, as the later history abundantly proves, He had diligently studied the sacred rolls, and "knew the Scriptures" from His youth. By the "sword of the Spirit," which is the "Word of God,"[1] He successfully resisted the repeated assaults of the tempter, instantly replying to each attack with material from that "Book of the Law,"[2] He so amply fulfilled, and which had been His "meditation day and night."[3]

What is noticeable is, that in an age of Scribes, and with abundant material to His hand, Jesus neither wrote, nor laid the emphasis on writing. So far as we know, He wrote only once, and then it was in dust.[4] Equally striking is the fact, that at the inception and inauguration of His wider ministry at Pentecost, transforming the "upper room" into a temple like to the scene of Isaiah's call,[5] He uses the symbol of "tongues like as of fire,"[6] once more consecrating human speech as the organ of the Spirit, and gaining forthwith through Peter's preaching the "first-fruits" of an unending harvest.

This deliberate selection of the prophetic method as the primary and permanent vehicle of conveying truth, is second only in importance to the truth itself. Nor is it conceivable that any change of circumstances at any time or among any people, will ever reduce it to a subordinate position.

[1] Eph. vi. 17.
[2] Deut. viii. 3; Exod. xx. 4.
[3] Psa. i. 2. [4] John viii. 6.
[5] Isa. vi. 1–8. [6] Acts ii. 3.

4. Our impression of the importance Jesus attached to the spoken word is heightened, as we pass to the significance of His action in calling and training the first preachers of His gospel. It is hardly too much to say that in nothing is the supremacy of Jesus as the King of men, and the Lord of life made more evident. More eloquently than any formal announcement, it declares the Divine intention of universal and permanent rule. Alike in the number and personnel of the twelve, we see how completely Jesus, while fulfilling the old, transcends the nationalism of His race.

And where did He find the first leaders, the nucleus of His new Israel? Not among the precipitous heights, the deep gorges, or the gloomy passes of Judea, standing off as it does from the great world roads of travel, and, where life, though intense, was cramped; its outlook always parochial, and its temper always conservative. Nor, as an ordinary leader would have done, in its religious capital of Jerusalem, where a stilted, prejudiced, and tyrannous ecclesiasticism, made the insertion of new ideas and methods always unwelcome and almost impossible.

If the generally accepted view is correct, that Judas Iscariot—the man of Kerioth—was the only apostle chosen from Judea, it adds deep significance to the study of the man, and to the fact that, of the twelve, he was the solitary failure.[1] There was a Kerioth in Moab, and some scholars accept identification with it, though the probabilities are that the home of Judas was in Judea.

[1] John vi. 70, 71.

The gloomy, narrow, conservative nature of Judas, his choice, development, and rejection, offer a study of profound interest. Won at first by the intense earnestness of Jesus, loving goodness and longing for the redemption of his nation, Judas had in him the making of an earnest and very successful apostle. With the gospels in our hands, we are able to trace, as the weeks and months passed, the disappointment of Judas with the ideals and programme of Jesus, as these were gradually unfolded in the closer companionship of the apostolic circle. We mark his refusal to open and expand to the catholicity and spirituality of the Son of universal Man. We see at length, how, selfishly and wilfully nursing his national programme, growing more and more apart from the Master, taking counsel with the enemies of Jesus, he passed from the possible lover to the actual traitor, and to the basest treachery.

It was in open, sunny-faced Galilee, with its spacious roadways, like the Esdraelon plain, linking East and West; with its easy access, just below Nazareth, to the Mediterranean Sea, pictorially, yet very truly described as the marriage-ring of nations; and particularly at the head quarters of the busy Lake, then a famous industrial centre in constant touch with Rome, here, among its humble, truth-seeking, sincere-minded fishermen and other workers, that Jesus discovered, called, and equipped the pathfinders and prophets of His kingdom.

And, since they were accepted and transformed

by the wondrous grace and spell of Jesus, who amongst men may not be exalted to the highest rank? In the presence of Jesus, and for the urgent need of our modern life, is not the longing of Moses a possibility within reach, "that all the Lord's people may be prophets"?[1]

True children of nature were these men. Untrained, rough, head-strong, intensely clannish, any ordinary observer would have said of either of them, these men are the most unpromising and unlikely instruments of a movement destined for universal rule. The study of their characteristics enables us to see in their total, a miniature humanity. Every mood, trait, or temper known to us is represented in the twelve. And as we reverently follow the transforming action of Jesus in the changed disposition, the loftier character, and the unselfish service of these men, raising them from obscure positions to be heralds and apostles of His redeeming purpose, we cease to be baffled before any of the marvellous works of Jesus. We feel that His nature miracles are trifling compared to these life miracles, the glory of His power in building character. He who made of these otherwise unknown residents of Galilee, "fishers of men,"[2] and apostles of the faith, must be Divine. The only cause equal to this effect is the first cause of all, even God!

5. When we pass from the call and invitation of Jesus to these men, to consider the intimacies and confidences of constant companionship which

[1] Num. xi. 29. [2] Mark i. 17.

followed, we pass into the Holy of holies of the Spirit. The words of our earliest gospel are deeply significant:—"And he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach."[1]

The nature of their training explains their subsequent transformation, and supplies the secret of their ultimate power. Ere they are allowed the privilege and responsibility of speech, they are first admitted into the sacred college of residence with Him! Think of all that meant for them, and means still! How more weightily could the emphasis of Jesus be declared, alike as to the solemn sanctity of the work of preaching, and the special character of the preacher's equipment?

The words of Mark just quoted should be deeply pondered by every candidate for the pulpit, whether lay or ministerial. Before and beyond any intellectual attainment, the work of preaching presupposes seclusion with Jesus. This always first and chief. The "laying on of hands" that matters, the really valid ordination, is the pressure of the "hands pierced for us." Nor, until we know and feel the steady and constant impact of His personality upon our own, waiting in profound reverence for Him as lovers, living with Him in the secret places of His love, can we expect to know His mind, or understand the treasures of grace He desires us to make known to others.

This is not to undervalue the work of the study, nor is it to depreciate the place of true scholarship.

[1] Mark iii. 14.

It is rather to offer to that side of the preacher's work an unfailing incentive. It is deeply and permanently true, that the longing for, and the effort to secure the highest intellectual efficiency, will be in exact proportion to the intensity and fulness of our love for the Person of Jesus. To be "with Him," makes the preacher evermore a student, and always the student of the highest and best. The effective antidote against intellectual stagnation is abiding fellowship with Jesus. The true goad to study is the apostle's longing to "know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings."[1] And in all this, since Jesus has declared, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world,"[2] the twelve possessed no advantage not equally open to disciples still, with all it involves of inquiry, explanation, correction, and ever-expanding vision.

The significance of this action of Jesus in calling the twelve to be "with Him," demands yet closer examination. For through them, and through what they came to be under His training, we may read His deepest thought and understand His permanent longing. Crude, bigoted, even fanatical, impulsive, retiring, open-hearted, restrained, even morose, proud, overbearing, uncharitable, transformed, triumphant, it would not be possible, in any time or place, to gather a company of men more representative of our common humanity, than the men honoured of Jesus "as the founders

[1] Phil. iii. 10.
[2] Matt. xxviii. 20.

and the foundation of His Church."[1] Looking upon the men as they were, and as the Master made them, we may reverently and thankfully say, "This was from the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes."[2]

Approximately, and always allowing for modifications necessary in any human characterization, the twelve may be classified into three main groups:—

(1) The Boanerges Group, representing men passion-filled, strong, built on spacious lines. To these belong the leaders of men, the daring adventurers and pathfinders among men. In this group we find:—Peter, the impulsive enthusiast, John, the whole-hearted, James, the martyr, and Andrew, the quiet worker.

(2) The Reflective and Critical Group, representing the persistent quest of the mind for satisfaction and reality, the longing for truth, the earnest and legitimate demands of the reason. In this group we find:—Philip, the questioner, Nathanael, the guileless and wondering, Thomas, the despondent, and Matthew, the social.

(3) The Hebraistic and Practical Group, representing the narrow, even the fanatical adherents of precedent, the conservative, afraid, lest in accepting the new, we may not do justice to the old. In this group, we find:—James, the practical, Simon Zelotes, the zealot or the zealous, Jude, the hearty, and last, always a long last, Judas Iscariot, the traitor.

[1] Fairbairn's *Studies in Religion*, p. 304.
[2] Mark xii. 11.

Again, let us say, the classification of the twelve here attempted lays no claim to accuracy, shading off as human nature always tends to do, into almost infinite variety, yet it serves as a general basis for the study of the men Jesus called to be "with Him."

It is as we watch the action of Jesus in and over these men, that we find our strongest argument for His supremacy. Diverse as the apostles were, with scarcely anything in common when they were first "apprehended" by Jesus, retaining under the culture of grace, their own individuality, yet they were welded and fused into a passion for Jesus, which, particularly after Pentecost, fitted them to go forth as the heralds of the Kingdom.

There is nothing in history like the changes Jesus wrought in the society of these first witnesses, unless, thanks to His holy name, it is the similar changes He has been producing ever since, and never on a larger scale than now!

These are the real miracles, of which all others are small hints, types, and symbols. We have been so long accustomed to associate the miraculous with action in the realm of the physical, that it is not easy to escape the slavery to that view. What is the healing of a body to wholeness of life? The distinctive miracles of Jesus are spiritual. And this living, penetrating, permanent power of Jesus in the realm of human motive and conduct, is His supreme and unanswerable claim to world-wide Messiahship!

In these men, let every preacher, every disciple hopefully say, it is open for the world to see what

companionship with Christ is capable of doing. The wonder lies, not in the doings of the men, but in the making of the men themselves. The inspirer is more than those inspired, especially where, as here, Jesus had to create the capacity to receive His inspiration, and the ability and strength to realize His ends. In Him, and with Him, the weakest of us may be mightier than we dream, the sense of insufficiency gives place to the consciousness of easy strength.

6. The emphasis of Jesus upon the proclamation of the Kingdom as His appointed method of extension, is further seen in the sending forth of the seventy.[1] It marks a striking development in the plan of Jesus, and plainly indicates His wider objective. It is deeply and permanently significant, that our Lord links up this new development with the ever-widening vision of the vastness of the work to be accomplished, and the need of constant appeal to Heaven that "labourers" may be raised up and "thrust forth" into harvest fields so "plenteous."[2] Would the preaching office ever lack for suitable candidates, if the Church sufficiently yearned over the world in need, and constantly kept before her young people the sense of obligation to go out and meet it?

But to return. When the twelve were sent forth, they were specifically directed to limit their ministry to their own people,[3] nor do we find that they crossed over, even to the half-Gentile districts on the east side of Jordan. Their ministry and

[1] Luke x. 1–9. [2] Luke x. 2. [3] Matt. x. 5–6.

office belonging to a more permanent order, and their "college training" in the day by day conversations with Jesus running its course, their wider commission would come later.[1]

The indications of our Lord's intention—not without its meaning for the twelve—are to be found in the fact, that while the directions to the seventy are parallel, almost identical with those issued earlier,[2] no such restriction of area is laid down for them. They are to go "into every city and place whither he himself was about to come."[3] And, as we know, His ministry compassed the border land of Tyre and Sidon on the extreme north-west,[4] and the east side of Jordan, covering the districts of Gadara and Decapolis.[5] Gradually, as they were able to understand it, they must share His own sense of Divine pressure, "I must preach the good tidings of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also; for therefore was I sent,"[6] words which could only culminate in a world-wide passion of preaching.

7. It is however, when we come to examine the substance of Jesus' preaching, and reverently follow, in the hope of imitating, His exquisite method and spirit, that the supreme place of Jesus as the preacher of His own kingdom, shines forth. The wise preacher, desiring to excel, will constantly refresh himself with this vision, and so preserve,

[1] Matt. xxviii. 19; Acts ii. 17–21.
[2] Matt. x. 1–15; Luke ix. 1–6; x. 1–11.
[3] Luke x. 1.
[4] Mark vii. 24–30. [5] Mark v. 1–17; vii. 31–37.
[6] Luke iv. 43.

from the deadness of routine and habit, the glow and the glory of his ideal.

The contents of our Lord's message, like the two arms of His uplifted and redeeming Cross, concern God and man, and His one, unvarying aim is, to compass their happy and permanent union. He touches the heights in God. He sounds the depths in man, and presently, as is always the case where the two themes are worthily presented, deep answers to deep, and the human heart responds to the ever solicitous, outstretched love of the Eternal Father.

Remembering the insignificant size of our Gospels —anyone of them could be read through at one sitting—remembering too that they must contain only fragments of the teaching lasting well on to three years ; remembering further, that the Gospels duplicate the record of the same gracious words and deeds, we can only wonder and adore the range, and the completeness of the Master's teaching as we have received it.

So viewed, the Gospels are the marvel of literature, and stand alone. Little as they are in bulk, they are, as their subject, infinite in their influence and permanent value. For Jesus is their subject. As Son of God, Son of man, He sums up in His own unique personality, all we need to know of both. This is only to state what Paul, in his own philosophy of redemption has set forth with such inimitable beauty :—"For in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or

dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things consist."[1]

And it follows that the preacher who will be true to His Master, and at the same time answer the deepest need of his own age, will make Jesus the centre of his preaching. In every sermon, some aspect of the Divine face will be seen, some echo of the gracious Divine appeal will be heard. Our gospels contain everything we need to know of God, for Jesus Himself is Deity translated into terms of life. They tell us all that we need to know of man, his weakness and strength, his sin and its cure, his failure and triumph. While life, duty, and the future, are so set forth, that no conceivable relationship is left without guidance, no ignorance unillumined by unfailing light, no despair or sorrow uncheered by the assurance of eternal day.

In keeping with the vastness and completeness of Christ's range of theme, is the wonder and beauty of His method and spirit, as He unfolded the rich treasure of His Gospel. He is in all this much more than the substance of the Preacher's message. He is the supreme and final model of the Preacher's method.

The comment of our earliest Gospel indicates the delight and charm which marked alike the manner and the matter of His preaching. "The common people—the multitude—heard him gladly," says Mark.[2] Our latest Gospel bears ample testimony,

[1] Col. i. 16, 17. [2] Mark xii. 37.

from quite another point of view, to the same impressive and wondrous style of Jesus. "Never man so spake,"[1] said the officers, excusing to their employers their failure to arrest Jesus. Men accustomed to the rough work of handling men were held off by an awe and impressiveness in Jesus, they were quite unable to explain.

Luke supplies a vivid picture of the way Jesus impressed His audience as He opened His ministry at Nazareth. The preacher in search of the best method will dwell upon it often, and always with profit:—"And all bare him witness, and wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth."[2]

In language always easily grasped, because the language of daily life, Jesus so declared the good news of His Kingdom, as to compel attention, even where, through the stringency of His demand, He failed to secure obedience. Using the figures, scenes, and appliances of home and work, of love and life, placing Himself at the level where He could find the point of contact, He so vividly and skilfully set before the mental and spiritual vision of His audience the far-away things of the Divine, as to make it almost the tangible, and always the real. As one who "knew what was in man,"[3] and all that belonged to life, and whose one aim was to link all up, as it ought to be linked with God, He "taught with authority,"[4] and so taught that His audiences "were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom?"[5]

[1] John vii. 46. [2] Luke iv. 22. [3] John ii. 25.
[4] Matt. vii. 29. [5] Matt. xiii. 54.

How wistfully and constantly should the preacher, sent forth by his Lord on the same glorious errand, to win men, prayerfully seeking "wisdom of him who giveth liberally,"[1] seek also the winsomeness of manner and grace of speech, by which, even when declaring the sterner truths of God's judgments, he should "by the manifestation of the truth commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."[2]

8. Unaided and unaccompanied, any man's heart may fail within him as he faces this stupendous work. Often indeed, as it is, and when he has done his best, he will be oppressed by the sense of his own unfitness. In all of which experience, he shares the burden of the prophets who have gone before him. In the nature and the exactions of its demand, the prophet's office has no competitor nor equal. The world offers no vocation so vast, so exhausting, so clamant, yet so attractive, as the work of preaching.

But let every preacher be encouraged as he remembers that his vocation was the chosen vocation and the unfailing delight of his Lord. Let him remember further as he seeks the varied equipment to its effective discharge, and as he prayerfully prepares his message, how his Master went the lonely way of long tarrying with the Father, and how patiently He trained those whom He called to be "with Him," in their art. And as, at length, he faces the tremendous responsibilities of its worthy utterance, let the preacher remember most

[1] James i. 5. [2] 2 Cor. iv. 2.

of all, that there stands with him "One who is alive for evermore,"[1] whose pierced hand holds the keys of all kingdoms, and whose generous "well-done"[2] never fails to encourage the heart of those who faithfully serve.

[1] Rev. i. 18. [2] Matt. xxv. 21.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Christian Prophets.

ACCEPTING for our present study the definition of "prophecy as inspired preaching,"[1] it is just what might have been expected that the triumph of Jesus, who, as we have seen,[2] first came "preaching the Kingdom of God," should—through the wonder of Pentecost—find expression in an order of prophetic utterance so unusual and spontaneous, as to recall and fill out the old prophecy of Joel:—"And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit."[3]

The study of origins is always an absorbing interest, the study of primitive Christianity the most absorbing of all. We feel again the thrill and glow of a new consciousness of power, and such an exuberance of joy as made silence im-

[1] *Peake's Commentary*, pp. 647, 844.
[2] See pp. 155–7.
[3] Joel ii. 28, 29.

possible. The atmosphere is free and bracing. Carried along by these gracious tides of the Spirit, untrammelled as yet by organization and officialism, the universal programme of Jesus is fairly launched forth upon the world under the highest sanctions, sustained by the deep convictions, the enthusiastic affection and the unrestrained eloquence of first-hand witnesses.

It is not without deep significance, that modern discussion is once more actively engaged with the origins of Christianity, and that the problems of early church organization are commanding the eager attention of devout scholars. Associated with this work of re-investigation, are the intensely practical and living questions of Christian unity, and the prevalent feeling that we are facing a new era of expansion and world-wide Christian advance.

It does not fall within our province to discuss these questions here. The discovery of such a remarkable document as the Didaché, or "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles," and now, the new situations created for us by the upheaval of the Great War, are compelling us to re-examine the simplicities of the years immediately following Pentecost. These may serve as partial explanations. May it not be reverently urged, as a deeper explanation, philosophically and spiritually more accurate, that they are rather proofs of that never-absent, always-guiding Spirit of God, pressing forward the Church in these new days to apprehend the larger truths of the Kingdom, in order to the achievement of those "greater

works" by which the Kingdom may the more quickly come?

But to return. Jesus had formulated no church order, nor had He elaborated rules either as to methods or position. From the first, "the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets,"[1] that is to say, God-inspired men will be their own mentors, holding court over themselves and their words, exercising becoming self-restraint, so as neither to grieve the brooding Spirit of God, nor give occasion of offence to men. It is of enormous significance, that, so far as externals were concerned, Jesus entrusted the entire fortunes of His religion to the loyalty of lovers. Hence the spontaneity, the spiritual ecstasy and even rapture of the Pentecostal period, creating the conditions always favourable to the fuller understanding of the Divine heart, and the prophetic declaration of the Divine mind. Hence too, the unwasting zeal, the unfettered action, and—let us longingly add—the unrestrained ingathering, by which "the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved."[2] Would not such experiences of the free day of the Spirit, constantly ensure for us similar gracious results?

It was inevitable that, as the enthusiasm of the earliest Pentecostal experiences came into contact with the conservatism and prejudice within the Jewish Church, and the mass of heathenism and indifference of that old Roman world outside, and particularly as the necessities of organization arose,

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 32. [2] Acts ii. 47.

such a free and unrestrained ministry as that of the apostles and prophets would be liable to serious and even gross abuses. This was indeed what happened, as we shall see later. Evidences of it are traceable in Paul's repeated references to the need of order in the growing community of Christians.[1]

It is however a tribute to the persistence of the prophetic spirit and ministry, that, long after what has been described as the "triumph in the primitive Church of the ministry of office over the ministry of enthusiasm," we find a most fitting and delightful unconventionality of method and freedom of movement in those received and honoured as the prophets of the Lord.

Even as the Hebrew prophet spoke under the consciousness of Divine pressure, so the earliest New Testament picture of these "speakers for God" reveals the same Divine authority and closeness of communion. Fresh from the solitude and training of the wilderness, John—the prophet of the Most High,[2] like another Elijah flinging himself unannounced upon Israel—came "preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins."[3] Zacharias, breaking down the old division of priest and prophet, under the compelling ministry of the Holy Spirit,[4] bursts forth into ecstatic and prophetic utterance concerning Jesus. Simeon, the "righteous and devout,"[5] under a similar pressure, in the act of blessing, declares concerning

[1] 1 Cor. xiv. 23–33, 40. [2] Luke i. 76. [3] Mark i. 4.
[4] Luke i. 67. [5] Luke ii. 25.

Jesus the sorrow out of which will come the greater revelation.[1] Anna—a prophetess—as representing the womanhood of the new order, "spake of him to all them that were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem."[2]

When we pass from the Divinely-chosen heralds belonging to the dawn of the new order, to those who, after Pentecost, continued the holy testimony, we find the same freedom from official restraint, the same opportunity to follow the obvious pointing of the Holy Spirit. As we move through all the stir and expansion of the Acts, we breathe an atmosphere of unrestrained liberty, altogether favourable to the exercise of the prophetic gift, in the direct inter-relation and communion of the human with the Divine. Hence we have the record of prophets in Jerusalem, Judas or Barsabbas and Silas, "chief men among the brethren," "being themselves also prophets,"[3] and of prophets "who in these days came down from Jerusalem unto Antioch,"[4] which forthwith became the capital of Gentile Christianity. In and from this new centre, Agabus,[5] Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius, and Manaen,[6] fulfil their prophetic ministry, all of them, in the characteristic language of the Acts, "signifying by the Spirit,"[7] or "being set apart by the Holy Ghost."[8]

And of this list, greatest of all, the writer of the wondrous Apocalypse, described by the angel as

[1] Luke ii. 34–35. [2] Luke ii. 36, 38.
[3] Acts xv. 22, 32. [4] Acts xi. 27. [5] Acts xi. 28.
[6] Acts xiii. 1. [7] Acts xi. 28. [8] Acts xiii. 2.

one "with thy brethren the prophets,"[1] who, "being in the Spirit,"[2] writes concerning that "testimony of Jesus (which) is the spirit of prophecy."[3]

How profoundly significant and instructive, as indicating undreamed of possibilities for the Church, setting forth as it does, the picture of a true Theocracy, God's will finding free and unhindered expression through willing and surrendered lives!

It is easy to understand that rapid expansion would call for organization, and with the growth of officialism the human element would necessarily come more prominently into view. As early as the appointment of the seven,[4] we mark the first effort of the Church as an organization. During the lifetime of Paul, and in the far-flung line of churches stretching across Asia and Europe even on to Rome, we recognize that the work of administration was essential alike for purposes of consolidation and expansion. We are not surprised therefore to find such officers as "bishops and deacons" recognized and saluted in a late, perhaps the last letter of Paul.[5] Yet for a long time subsequent to the rise of the official class, the freedom we have noted as belonging to the charismatic ministry, i.e., the "ministry of gift" bestowed by God, as distinguished from the "ministry of office," conferred by man, remained unchallenged. In keeping with this, throughout Paul's letters, when

[1] Rev. xxii. 9. See also *Revelation*, International Critical Comm. vol. i. Intro., pp. 39, 43.
[2] Rev. i. 10. [3] Rev. xix. 10.
[4] Acts vi. 1–6. [5] Philipp. i. 1.

dealing with ranks, and gifts, and offices in the Church, while the lists themselves vary, the prophetic always takes rank with the apostolic.[1]

As supplying confirmation and illustration of the New Testament portrait of the Christian prophet, and at the same time enlarging it, we may again refer a little more at length to the discovery and contents of "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles." The testimony of Harnack to the importance of this fragment is worth quoting:—"What the Didaché has done for us is to supply a missing link in the history of the sub-apostolic age."

This valuable manuscript was discovered by Bryennios, a bishop and metropolitan of the Orthodox Eastern Church in 1873, in the Jerusalem Convent in Constantinople. It probably belongs to the early years of the second century.

Beneath the quaintly definite, even stringent tests by which the apostles and prophets were estimated and judged, a study of this document enables us to understand better the influence they exercised, and the esteem in which they were held. We are further able to estimate more accurately, not only the rapid extension of Christianity throughout the Empire, but the extraordinary linking up and welding of the scattered churches into a unity, before which ultimately the solid mass of heathenism was compelled to give way. We discover too, that these apostles and prophets were itinerating evangelists, going from place to place,

[1] 1 Cor. xii. 28; Rom. xii. 6–8; Ephes. ii. 20; iii. 5; iv. 11.

from one Christian community to another, preaching the Word, instructing converts, inspiring, comforting, and reproving as the need required. "It would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of these travelling apostles, prophets, and teachers. It is true that we have few records of their activity, and that their names have nearly all perished; but the general results of their work are very apparent, and the few references we have to them show how numerous and how diligent they must have been."[1]

That such a travelling ministry as the Didaché describes would be abused is easily conceivable. Men so honoured as these apostles, prophets, and teachers were, would be the envy of the unscrupulous, and their imitators would impose upon the warm-hearted and generous disciples of the scattered churches. It is indeed clear, alike from the pages of the New Testament,[2] and the safeguards laid down in the Didaché, that such false prophets were very numerous, and that they constituted a real danger to the growing Christian community. These safeguards may appear to us quaint and even crude, yet it is certain they were the outcome of immediate necessity, the fruit of many a painful experience. As over against that, let it be remembered, that the very severity of the tests they applied to their prophets, reveals an accurate understanding of what the religion required, and a resolute

[1] McGiffert's, *A History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age*, p. 641.
[2] 1 John iv. 1; 2 Pet. ii. 1–3.

purpose to preserve the loftiness of its ideal. In all this, these early Christians are our pattern still! What they insisted upon from their teachers, was the exhibition of the spirit of Jesus. Anything contrary to that, stamped them as false!

Hospitality for these travelling evangelists was expected of the churches visited, and most explicit directions are laid down:—

> "Now concerning the Apostles and Prophets, according to the decree of the gospel, so do ye. Let every apostle that cometh to you be received as the Lord; but he shall not stay save for one day; but if there be necessity, the next day also; but if he stay three, he is a false prophet. And let the Apostle when he departs take nothing save bread (to last him) till he reaches his night's lodging. But if he ask for money, he is a false prophet. But not every one that speaketh in spirit is a Prophet, but (only) if he have the ways of the Lord; from their ways then shall the false prophet and the Prophet be known. And every Prophet, though he teach the truth, if he doeth not the things that he teacheth, is a false prophet. But every Prophet, approved, genuine, who doth (something) for a worldly mystery of the Church, yet not teaching others to do as much as he doth himself, shall not be judged of you; for he hath his judgement with God. For even so did the ancient prophets also. But whosoever saith in spirit: Give me money or any other things—ye shall not listen to

him: but if he tell you to give on behalf of others that have need, let no man judge him."[1]

While apostles were expected to itinerate, and not reside in any given church or community, it was open to the prophet to do either. As a settled pastor, he occupied the highest place of honour in the congregation. He officiated in the Eucharist as a high-priest; and while others were expected to confine themselves to a prescribed formula of prayer, the prophet is "to be allowed to give thanks as much as he will."[2] For the prophets of local churches the following directions are laid down:—

> "But every genuine Prophet who willeth to settle with you, is worthy of his meat. (In like manner a genuine Teacher is worthy, he too like the workman, of his meat.) So every first-fruit of the products of wine-press and threshing floor, of oxen and sheep, thou shalt take and give as a first-fruit to the Prophets; for they are your high-priests. But if ye have not a Prophet, give to the poor. If thou art making a batch of bread, take the first-fruit and give according to the commandment. In like manner when thou dost open a jar of wine or oil, take the first-fruit and give to the Prophets. But of money and raiment and every possession take the first-fruit as may seem good to thee, and give according to the commandment."[3]

[1] *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, chap. XI.
[2] *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, chap. X.
[3] Chap. XIII.

Before passing from the consideration of the place and function of the prophet in the early Christian Church, it is important to point out that there is no barrier, either of sex or position, to the exercise of the prophetic ministry. It is of great significance, as indicating the wider horizons of Christianity, that the New Testament follows the prophetic, not the priestly order, and therefore, given the essential qualifications and call, woman has an equal right to the work of preaching as man. In the history of Israel, women appear from time to time as inspired prophetesses. With Moses is associated Miriam, described as a "prophetess,"[1] who claims her right in the words, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only with Moses? hath he not spoken also with us?"[2] In the time of the Judges, Deborah ranks not only as a prophetess, but as judge.[3] In the time of Jeremiah we have Huldah, the prophetess to whom the messengers of Josiah applied when they were directed to "inquire of the Lord."[4]

We have already referred to the striking instance of Anna the prophetess,[5] standing midway between the old and the new, breaking out into ecstatic utterance, as, meeting the wondrous babe in the glory of the temple communion and vision, she declares to the assembled worshippers the fact of redemption now brought so near.[6] The passing reference to the four daughters of the evangelist

[1] Exod. xv. 20. [2] Num. xii. 2.
[3] Judges iv. 4, 5. [4] 2 Kings xxii. 13–20; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 22.
[5] See p. 180. [6] Luke ii. 38.

Philip, as those "which did prophesy,"[1]—in those larger days of the Spirit when "sons and daughters should prophesy"[2]—may stand for a ministry much more widely exercised than our records declare.

It is easy to exaggerate the scope and purpose of Paul's injunction, "Let the women keep silence in the churches,"[3] and especially to ignore the local difficulties and delicate situations associated with the early government of the widely scattered, rapidly extending Christian communities. Paul's directions and general discussion of the public position of woman in the church, must be read in the light of the eastern position of that day, not in the wider point of view of our western practice, a point of view he did so much to make possible. As over against the narrower—and for perfectly valid reasons temporary—injunction, forbidding the public ministry of women, we must place the great Pauline declaration of principle, that "in Christ Jesus there can be no male and female."[4] Every other direction is an accommodation to existing prejudice or weakness, and an illustration of the love that seeks by all means to save. No such restrictions or expediences could permanently live when once the essential unity of all in Christ was understood.

In these greater days of the Son of man, hearing as we may the clamant call for world-evangelism, let us unfeignedly rejoice, that the ministry of preaching, is now recognised as the opportunity

[1] Acts xxi. 9. [2] Acts ii. 17.
[3] 1 Cor. xiv. 34; 1 Tim. ii. 12. [4] Gal. iii. 28.

of the consecrated and duly qualified womanhood equally with the manhood of our churches. So far the delay of the Kingdom may be partly explained by our unwillingness to recognise such an equality of right, and that too often, on grounds of sex, we have limited and discouraged the exercise of the prophetic gift.

Surely the Lord, who gladly accepted the fruit of the Samaritan woman's evangelistic zeal,[1] and who, in the larger day of His risen life, gave to woman the first commission to go and make Him known,[2] is calling His Church to requisition these unused reserves of effective service, that, through the quickened ministry of prophet and prophetess alike, He may the more quickly come to His own!

Unquestionably the place of the prophet in the primitive Church was a very important one. And his contribution to the rapid spread and establishment of the new faith as the recognised exponent of it, must have been invaluable.

We may judge as to the measure of the importance of the prophets in the early Church, by the esteem in which they were held. They were regarded as the special gift of God, moving and speaking under the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. Free of any external control, those who were approved as prophets were also so far beyond the criticism and judgment of men, that the author of the "Didaché" classes any such criticism with the sin against the Holy Ghost. "Every Prophet speaking in spirit

[1] John iv. 28, 29, 39–42. [2] John xx. 11–18.

ye shall not try nor judge; for every sin shall be forgiven, but this sin shall not be forgiven."[1]

Such a position, however, carried with it great perils. Indeed, the higher the regard in which the prophet was held, the greater was the need of self-discipline and watchfulness on the part of the prophet, and the more exposed was the office itself to the unscrupulous place-seeker and imitator.

Remembering the excitability and credulity of the Eastern mind, remembering too the long line of churches stretching from Jerusalem to Rome, composed largely of Gentile Christians, exposed to their old pagan associations, with its mantic ecstasies of professional magicians, diviners, and soothsayers, it is not a matter of surprise that as the second century wore on, the separate office of the prophet declined in authority, and that instead of the old formula, "God continually confers on the church, apostles, prophets and teachers," the word now was, "The church is founded in the (written) word of the prophets, (the Old Testament prophets) and the apostles (the twelve and Paul)."

The rapid expansion of the early Church called for the appointment of duly qualified officers to administer its affairs, to be responsible for its discipline, and, generally to regulate its order. Such officialism inevitably carried with it responsibility and authority. It need occasion no surprise therefore, that, with the growth of organization, the possibility of a rivalry between the unregulated activity of both the itinerant and settled prophet

[1] *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles* chap. XI.

—however unintentional and regrettable at first—would be likely to end in the victory of what has been already described as the "ministry of office," over the "ministry of enthusiasm." To this consideration, we must add the mischief wrought in the churches by the rapid multiplication of the counterfeit or false prophet, calling often for prompt and drastic action on the part of those responsible for the fair name and true prosperity of the Church. We can easily understand that such discernment as was necessary, with the consequent discipline of the offending hirelings, would result in suspicion, conflict, and division, between the authority of gift, and the authority of position, always tending to widen the cleavage which had already set in. Add to this the very real dangers—always present in the Church—of a lowered spiritual tone, a too-ready accommodation to worldly standards, a tendency to rely on machinery rather than on personal devotion, and we may call up a generally accurate position of the Church in the second century.

It was out of such conditions that the movement known as Montanism had its rise. Beginning in an attempt to revive the place of the prophet, it ended in discrediting the office, and in the final passing of the prophet as a separate order in the Church.

The movement originated at Pepuza, in Phrygia, about the year 156. Montanus (said to have been a heathen priest before his conversion), not only claimed to be a prophet, but to be the Paraclete

whom Jesus had promised to His disciples. With him were associated two prophetesses, Prisca and Maximilla, who declared that they were the new incarnations of Deity, with authority to supersede the teachings of the apostles, and even to say more than had been said by Jesus Himself.

They held that the coming of Jesus was near at hand, that He would shortly set up His Kingdom at Pepuza and Tymion, to which Phrygian towns all Christians were summoned to assemble in preparation for the return. As against what they regarded as the secularizing of the church, they enjoined greater separation from the world, fastings, celibacy, the sin of second marriages, and a general tightening of discipline.

Almost simultaneously with this new movement a bitter persecution of Christians broke out in various parts of the Empire. Inasmuch as every such outbreak of suffering was taken as a sign of Christ's near return, it served as a stimulus to the Montanist movement, so that it rapidly spread throughout Asia Minor, to Rome, to Southern Gaul, and even to North Africa, where it won a notable convert in the person of Tertullian.

This strange revivalistic movement of the second century—and it has its parallels, down to the Irvingite excitement of the early nineteenth century—left its mark upon the growing Church. It succeeded as we have seen, in discrediting the prophetic function in which it gloried, and of which it foolishly claimed a monopoly. It strengthened the officialism against which it rose in protest, and

which it sought to destroy. But as such fanaticisms often do, even in its exaggerations it called attention to essential phases of truth in danger of being overlooked. Particularly it exposed the growing peril of reliance upon mere human appointments and authority, it forced the Church to see—and this is its permanent contribution of value—that only as churches are the unhindered organ of the Holy Spirit's presence and power, can they justify their place or realise their Divine mission to the world.

But though the local position of the prophet in the early Church stood thus discredited, so that it disappears from the ecclesiastical official lists—even as the term apostle does—the need and the work of the prophet remained and remains still. And, thank God! the response to the need, and the achievement of the work, have never been wanting. Within and without the ranks of the regular ministry, the true prophets of God are an unbroken succession. To deny it would be to deny the presence of Jesus in and with His people, always raising up, empowering and thrusting forth men and women, who, moved by the inward promptings of the Holy Spirit, feeling like Jeremiah, God's word "in their hearts as it were a burning fire shut up in their bones,"[1] "cannot but write and speak the things God gives them to write and speak."[2]

Nor will this redeeming and essential ministry fail, until "love's work complete," "prophecy shall be done away,"[3] in the universally acknowledged "fulness of him that filleth all in all."[4]

[1] Jer. xx. 9. [2] Acts iv. 20. [3] 1 Cor. xiii. 8. [4] Eph. i. 23.

CHAPTER IX.

The Place of the Preacher in Modern Life.

IT was the distinctive glory of the Hebrew prophet that he stood for God and man as the living oracle of the eternal Spirit, and in such vital correspondence with the eternal mind, as to mediate between the timeless and the passing. Knowing the thought of God, his work was the translation of the Divine purpose into the forms and characters of current thought and speech.

This is precisely the place and work of the preacher. This correctly defines the nature of the holy succession, and in this specific way, the man called of God to preach continues the work of the ancient prophet.

The remark of Hermann Schultz that "A religion which is growing has Prophets; a religion completed has Scribes," is profoundly true. Christianity is a growing religion. What was said concerning the resurrection scene of Jesus, that He rose "as it began to dawn,"[1] may very truly be said of the revelation our risen Lord brought to light,[2] by His gospels. It is always facing

[1] Matt. xxviii. 1. [2] 2 Tim. i. 10.

new problems, greeting new light, going out to new conquests. If the advent and work of Jesus ended one dispensation, it opened another, and, concerning its ever-enlarging scope, alike of thought and action, we may thankfully affirm, "no man can shut it."[1] The closing of the sacred canon was not the end of revelation. The gift of the eternal Spirit at Pentecost, breaking up the varied wonders of redeeming grace into the "many tongues" of universal man, suggests a full-toned harmony of expression, requiring ever new settings and adaptations of the one eternal music.

This fact alone creates the office, and calls for the utterance of the modern prophet. It is not his work to invent a gospel, any more than it was the work of his Hebrew prototype to declare his personal opinions or views of current events. It is emphatically to declare "the gospel he has received,"[2] but whose ever widening meanings and adaptations to the changing forms of human thought and development, require the living organ in living touch with God and with men.

And this is surely a sufficient answer to those who, in writing or in speech, affirm that the modern pulpit is decadent, and that the work of preaching is supplanted by the increase of education and scholarship, the power of the modern press, or the popularity of the picture. But why set in antagonism, or place as in unholy rivalry agencies which are indispensable, or may be useful to the

[1] Rev. iii. 8.
[2] 1 Cor. xi. 23; xv. 1; Gal. i. 9.

equipment and effectiveness of the preacher's work?

We have particularly in mind here, the work of the scholar, bringing to the preacher the treasures of scholarship. The ministry of the one is essential to the other, and both are the gift of God. To speak of them as superior and subordinate, or to set one against the other as though they represented opposing aims, is to confuse thought, and erect barriers, which, being artificial, are false. The work of the preacher combines the ministry of instruction, persuasion, and appeal. For the effectiveness of his ministry, he requires the researches of the scholar, who patiently pursues the study of origins, weighs evidence, eliminates human accretions from our sacred documents, and thus constantly offers to the preacher the valuable results of the trained expert.

When the work of constructing the Mersey Tunnel commenced—uniting Cheshire with the busy city of Liverpool—workmen on either side of the river, acting under the guidance of skilled leaders, started operations on the same day and hour. So perfect was the workmanship, that, as the workers neared the centre of the river, they could hear the workmen from the opposite side, and ultimately they met at the same point. Similarly, the work of the scholar and preacher, bent on the same glorious errand, culminates in making plain the road by which the preacher, in the life-travel of his brief opportunity, may assist his fellow-pilgrims to the city of true desire.

There are other reasons for dismissing as artificial or partisan the discussion of the claims made for education, the press or the cinema, to rival and supplant the pulpit.

The growing knowledge of psychology enables us the better to understand why the organ of speech has been ordained of God as a primal means of conveying truth. It is the impact of life upon life which is creative and quickening. We may at any time test, as we recall our experience with our fellow-men, and especially as we study the crowd, how the influence of the living voice, accompanied by the play of tone, or of look, or the outgoing of personality, as "virtue" goes forth from the speaker, will act and re-act upon emotion, desire and will, producing immediate and permanent results in character and conduct, altogether impossible to cold type, or the mechanical and stilted impression of the moving picture.

Beyond all, the reason assigned by Paul for the distinctiveness and primacy of the preacher's office, the reason which satisfied his own mind and heart, is also sufficient for us: "It was God's good pleasure through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."[1] This effectually silenced all criticism, and holds the field against the suggestion of a rival. So long as the present order remains, the permanence of preaching is secured. A vocation, resting upon and founded in the infinite wisdom and deliberate choice of the Eternal Love

[1] 1 Cor. i. 21.

is, like His Church, built upon rock, and will, with it, equally endure.

But while, as we have seen, the office of the preacher, and the function of preaching, rests broad-based in the counsels of the Eternal Wisdom and Love, no true "speaker for God" presumes upon that, nor must he claim a hearing by reason of his official ordination, or separation to the sacredness of the pulpit. He must justify the inherent assumption of primacy by his *work*. As God's living oracle, mediating between the eternal and the temporal, interpreting and relating the one to the other, the preacher must "have understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do."[1]

The Hebrew prophet was always abreast of his age. He studied deeply and interpreted accurately the actual conditions of his day. He was for men "God's expert," applying eternal truth to the passing phases and conditions of life. He was the hardest worker, the closest observer, the keenest thinker, the most ardent and eager lover of his day. He lived for God, and therefore he toiled and wrought for man. With the result, that, while his supremacy in the nation was frequently challenged, and his counsel rejected, yet his premier position as God's messenger was never successfully contested, and, as the man who knew the times, he easily commanded the first place.

The modern preacher is called to deserve and command the same unassailable supremacy in the

[1] 1 Chron. xii. 32.

life of men, and in the guidance of human affairs. By its power to interpret the highest truth, and therefore the truth comprehending all that really concerns man, by its creation of the right atmosphere in which truth may be clearly seen, and all relationship rightly appraised, the pulpit possesses a place unshared by either parliament, press, or picture. Where it is really "worthy," it abides under the benediction of God's own peace, and is established in the hope and confidence of man. Concerning such a pulpit, it may be truly said:—"the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."[1]

These are admittedly high claims for the place of the pulpit, and for the work of the preacher. But a vocation so ordained of God, especially on its prophetic side, cannot be too sacredly esteemed and guarded.

1. We turn now to look at our modern world, as the Hebrew prophet faced the world of his day, and our inquiry concerns the conditions, dangers, demands, and needs, of our own century, particularly as its course has been deflected and determined by the world-upheaval of the Great War. We have but to glance at the outwardly complacent and hopeful signs of world-progress, as we crossed the imaginary line separating the nineteenth from the twentieth centuries, in order to find how complete the deflection has been, and how entirely the War has formed one of those great watersheds of history, by which, in the forward and upward movement of the world, new situations are

[1] Matt. xvi. 18.

presented, and new adaptations of thought and method are required.

Intellectual and reasoned atheism was a force spent and exhausted. Scholarship, science, and discovery, working independently and in fields far apart, had made of our Bible a book, more reasonable, more human, and therefore more Divine, than our fathers knew or could have known. Distance was being annihilated, bringing the world of opportunity to our doors. Long-standing divisions were being healed in the churches, so that bitterness and separation were giving place to co-operation and union. A general expectation prevailed throughout Christendom, that the first century of missionary sowing—the nineteenth—would be followed by a century of world-saving harvest. This found its legitimate and worthy fruit in the World Missionary Conference of Edinburgh, 1910, the greatest assembly of Christian workers in the history of the Modern Church. The aims and longings of that Conference, interpreting the outlook and faith of the Christian world of that day, finds expression on the first page of the nine volumes recording the work of that assembly:—

> "The Church is confronted to-day, as in no preceding generation, with a literally world-wide opportunity to make Christ known. There may have been times when in certain non-Christian lands the missionary forces of Christianity stood face to face with as pressing opportunities as those now presented in the same fields, but never before has there been

> such a conjunction of crises and of opening of doors in all parts of the world as that which characterizes the present decade. It is likewise true that never on the home field have the conditions been more favourable for waging a campaign of evangelization adequate in scope, in thoroughness, and in power."[1]

From these dreams and assurances of "conditions never more favourable for waging a campaign of evangelization," we were startled by the dramatic suddenness of a war, which even now, as we recall its tragedy of horror, baffles us by its unprecedented magnitude and its world-shaping results. We discovered what we ought to have made clear long ago, that while the world outside Europe was rapidly moving towards democratism, our European civilization was a thin veneer, and rested upon foundations autocratic and feudal. Such a foundation was ripe, rotten-ripe for destruction. The war has done the world the service of declaring that such a foundation is neither right toward God, nor just toward man. That a true democracy everywhere should prepare the world for a real theocracy. That there is room in this world for one autocrat only, and that His name is Jesus!

2. The conditions therefore under which the modern preacher works and makes his appeal are radically and permanently changed. And the change is for the better. It supplies the "more favourable conditions for waging a campaign of evangelization," believed to exist in 1910. With

[1] *World Missionary Conference*, vol. i. p. 1.

the removal of the autocratic, the mediæval and feudal basis of society, our Gospel of freedom, of brotherhood, of true equality, where "there can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male and female, for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus,"[1] for the first time comes to its own, and secures its opportunity of glorious witness.

But the modern situation is beset with danger, to which of all men, the preacher who will be the prophet of his generation, must be sensitive and alert, and concerning which he must "Cry aloud, and spare not."[2] The materialistic philosophy and practice out of which the war came, has not been destroyed by the baptism of blood and tears through which we have lately passed. That indeed should have been its effect. Had the world profited by its latest agony, as was hoped, and as it ought to have done, it would have forthwith and finally abandoned materialism as the bottom curse, flinging it into the deepest hell of wrath, a hell terrible as the "wrath of the Lamb,"[3] or as the "consuming fire"[4] of the eternal Love of God.

So far from that, on the surface at least and for the present, the war appears to have established materialism and given it deeper root. It has found expression everywhere in an orgy of selfishness, which takes the form either of inordinate greed or riotous indulgence, as though life had no higher meaning or end than external possession or passing enjoyment.

[1] Gal. iii. 28. [2] Isa. lviii. 1.
[3] Rev. vi. 16. [4] Heb. xii. 29.

The conditions against which Amos[1] and Hosea[2] contended in Samaria, and Isaiah[3] in Judah, have had their counterpart in our own fair England, on the continent of Europe, and in the mighty states of the West. Suddenly the delineations and warnings of the prophets have acquired a modern illustration and fulfilment altogether unlooked for. For the years during and since the war, our Annual Drink Budget records amounts exceeding everything in our history, while the disgusting scenes of the boxing-ring, and the attractions of the race-course, with its attendant mania of gambling, have secured, what the official reports have described with monotonous repetition, as "record crowds."

Nor is this hasty survey of the dangers attending the modern conditions of the preacher's work, in any sense exaggerated. So far from that—the records of our daily press being witness—it errs in its limited range, and in its under-statement of the facts. Nor is the exposure of such conditions a pleasant task. Nor again is the expositor of modern dangers and perils likely to be more acceptable to his own time and people, than were his predecessors of Israel and Judah. The word "pleasant" has been greatly over-valued in recent times, as though it were a "cause" rather than an accompaniment, an "end in itself" rather than a by-product of duty nobly done. The Hebrew prophet was not called to consider pleasantness, but truth. He cared little for favour, he cared

[1] Amos viii. 4. [2] Hosea iv. 1, 2. [3] Isa. v. 11, 12; viii. 19.

everything that he should be known as one faithful. Much less does this necessary work of diagnosis and denunciation belie our earlier statement, that the changed world into which we have come, and in which we work, "is a change for the better." That remains true. And its truth adds eagerness to the preacher's longing, and passion to the preacher's appeal, as he sees the greater good within easy range, yet so likely to be lost in a vain pursuit of the things that perish.

3. It follows that the modern preacher, constantly taking stock, as he must do, of the world of his own day, is faced by the insistent demand of the hour, and is burdened by a knowledge of the still more urgent needs of the time to which he is sent as the "oracle of God." Like his Hebrew pattern, the preacher, while taking his message with all its tremendous implications direct from God, must, at the same time, keep close to men and to the realities of his day. For is not his supreme aim to mediate the two, in order that as "God's ambassador," he may succeed in his ministry of reconciliation?[1] Like his Lord, therefore, he must "know what is in man,"[2] his desires and hopes, the nature of his demands, the whole tendency and direction of his manner of life.

But it *is* as God's oracle that he must know man. This point of view must determine the line of his approach, alike to his fellow-men and to their demands. Similarly, it must supply the qualification, as it enforces the duty of discerning between

[1] 2 Cor. v. 20. [2] John ii. 25.

the "demand" of men and their "need." It is true that the preacher comes to men as "the servant of all," yet "One is his Master, even Christ."[1] "If he wash the disciples' feet it must be not merely as a poor serving brother, but with the kind dignity of the agent and apostle of Christ." The demand of the uninstructed age, and often alas! the unspiritual within the Church, must not be allowed to over-ride the one instructed in the mind of Christ.[2]

Just as we have not to invent a gospel, but to declare the gospel we have received, so neither have we to echo the desires of the world, nor concede without discrimination the demands of men. Our work is to lead the world, not to echo it; to confront it with a positive, "Thus saith the Lord"; even to resist it to the point of our own rejection, in order that, refusing the "demand," we may open men's eyes to their "need" as in the sight of God. The confusion between "demands" and "needs," is like the confusion often met with between "prejudices" and "principles." We require to search them through and through as with "the candle of the Lord," that we may successfully expose the one, and usefully expound the other.

The modern preacher is placed in an age when the demand is for what is popular. The age is restless, impatient of delay. It calls for quick returns. Success is gauged by numbers rather than by quality, by immediate results rather than by permanent issues.

[1] Matt. xxiii. 10. [2] 1 Cor. ii. 16.

And the agony of the modern prophet is, that he often finds this demand from within the Church, and this arithmetical estimate of his ministry, from among those whom he might fairly expect to be as his own right hand, and the sharers of his holiest ideals. The demand being for longer and more frequent "socials," and for shorter "sermons," the preacher is made to feel that unless he cuts his message down, his influence will be weakened, and those responsible for his support will fall away.

This is but another way of saying that the cry of men is always for an easy gospel, a gospel which makes little demand upon what they regard as essential and precious. Our modern world is particularly prone to this heresy. Its strain and tension in other realms, re-acts upon religion most of all, so that religion itself is regarded as "merely a refuge and a balm for men so jaded with the pursuit of the world as to be fit on Sundays for no more than a warm bath or a sacred concert."[1]

To all such appeals of popular opinion and mere love of ease, the preacher, always "speaking the truth in love,"[2] must make clear to his time, its deepest need, its abiding obligations to the Eternal Law and the Eternal Love. It must never be forgotten that the preacher is the constant recipient of other "demands," and is impelled by the pressure of an inward sense of "need" he must obey. "Whether the people will hear, or whether they will forbear,"[3] the preacher has no option; he serves

[1] Principal Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, p. 146.

[2] Eph. iv. 15. [3] Ezek. ii. 5; iii. 11.

under orders he disobeys on peril of his own soul. As "the prisoner of the Lord,"[1] he cries out, like Paul, "Necessity is laid upon me; for, woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel."[2] And as one thus called, chosen, equipped of God, it is not for an uninstructed age, or an unspiritual Church, because it finds the material support for the preacher, to "call the tune," or attempt to exalt a popular demand into the realm of duty or right.

The preacher is therefore compelled, irrespective of consequences, and always discriminating between "demand" and "need," to tell his age that the gospel he brings is not easy, only as love for its Author makes it so. He has to challenge the best, not the worst in man. He must appeal to the heroic, not to the cowardly. It is his task to make clear that the most exacting demand of Jesus is at the same time the "one thing needful." And it is his duty to point out that only in obedience to such a call, can the age be delivered from the ruin which all history declares is the penalty of neglecting God.

The whole case, applying with special force to the present situation, has been so well stated by the late Principal Forsyth that we take the liberty to quote his words as the conclusion to this section of our theme: "It is not cheer that we need, but salvation, not help but rescue, not a stimulus but a change, not tonics but life. It is the authority of a Redeemer, of one who is the organ to us of a new world. The first duty of every soul is to

[1] Eph. iv. 1. [2] 1 Cor. ix. 16.

find not its freedom, but its Master."[1] In the declaration of that gospel of Redemption and Authority, the pulpit has no competitor, nor the preacher any instructor but Jesus only.

4. The challenge and call of such a situation is the most solemn and urgent ever addressed to the heart and mind of man. Its appeal to the modern pulpit for interpretation and direction is pathetically insistent. It constitutes an opportunity for the pulpit almost without parallel. On a scale nothing short of world-wide, we have been and are the witnesses of a history and a movement greater than anything that has happened since the birth of Jesus. In the shattering of dynasties which has recently taken place, we have seen every possible rival of Jesus tried and found wanting. The logic of events has shut the world in to the answers of our gospel.

It is surely the exercise of this prophet function, authoritatively and fearlessly applying the wondrous fulness of that gospel to current events, for which the world waits. From the ruin of the old civilization, resting as it did on material foundations, the prophets of God should insist that the upbuilding of the new order must rest on the permanencies of God's appointments, and the character that God builds.

The word of Isaiah to his panic-stricken, compromise-loving people, is precisely the word of the modern prophet to an age, which, ignoring the obvious lessons of the war, tends to re-construct

[1] *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind*, pp. 56, 57.

our modern world on the ruinous foundations of compromise and external force. "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."[1] For individuals and for nations it is permanently true, that they find their only safety in abandoning all false alliances, and in resuming relations of loyalty to the Eternal Law and the Eternal Love. And that the strength which is strength indeed, is rooted in the contented assurance of companionship with the all-sufficient God! Surely it is the duty of the pulpit to compel the statesmen and leaders of all peoples to heed these counsels of Eternal Wisdom, and shape their course by the guidance of this Eternal Light!

It is not contended that the application of this prophetic ministry to international, national, social, and domestic relationships, is either easy or pleasant. It must, on the contrary, be avowed that it is a work of extraordinary difficulty, requiring insight, knowledge, patience, fearlessness, and tact. For the preacher, unlike the politician or the writer for the daily press, must always be independent of party or class. Since the preacher is first and always God's man, he must, like Paul, "henceforth know no man after the flesh,"[2] by which is here meant, that, as a preacher of God's truth, and in a place which should never be the platform of a party, he must ignore the schools and factions into which men of necessity are grouped. As a man, the preacher may not be

[1] Isa. xxx. 15. [2] 2 Cor. v. 16.

denied his political or his civil rights. No church has the right to exact political disfranchisement of the man it calls to be the spiritual guide of its affairs. But neither has any preacher the right to pervert the function of the pulpit to encourage class strife, or to mere party political propaganda. As a preacher, he must impartially apply the Gospel entrusted to him, irrespective of class, speaking there, as John Knox told Queen Mary, "as one who has no option, but to speak the things God has given me to speak, and to fear no flesh on the face of the earth."

That such a prophetic, fearless, truth-speaking ministry will often be far from popular, that it will cause some to take offence and fall away, is but to know and share the burden of the prophet's call. It is to stand in the line of the true prophetical succession. This however, while it will cause disappointment and give pain,[1] is neither the first nor the abiding concern of the preacher. He knows full well, that, while he has nothing to gain by the favour of men, he has nothing to fear from their dislike.

To cut across personal prejudices, to smite public wrong and political intrigue, to refuse to be the "echo" of a popular cry, and claim the right to be a "voice" speaking for and on behalf of God, to denounce as sectarian and wicked the modern creed, "My country, right or wrong," this is not pleasant to flesh and blood. But it is the distinctiveness of the prophetic office that it "confers

[1] John vi. 66–67.

not with flesh and blood,"[1] and takes no count of either position or consequences.

It never willingly gives pain, but even though the preacher knows he will wound, he dare not modify, or withhold, remembering the greater pain of disloyalty to his Lord. He will always "speak the truth in love,"[2] being assured it is the truth God would have him speak.

Such prophets are the need of every age. Never more were they needed than now. Never was the field of the world whiter to the harvest of such a ministry than at the beginning of this new day of the Son of Man. Let the pulpits of all lands be filled with such seers and speakers for God, and in such a case, the greatest days of the pulpit and of the lands are yet to be!

[1] Gal. i. 16. [2] Eph. iv. 15.

CHAPTER X.

The Preacher's Equipment.

FROM the discussion of the opportunity and call for a truly prophetic ministry such as we have just outlined—in our view the most insistent need of this or of any age—we pass naturally to consider the nature and scope of the equipment required for a work so great, and for a purpose so glorious.

In every department of thought and action, there is a growing tendency to place the emphasis upon the specialist, the expert. As the world grows older, and the boundaries of knowledge are extended, it is found that while general knowledge is assumed as indispensable, the need for the specialist, devoting himself to some particular department of investigation, and making the pursuit of truth there his life-work, is regarded as essential to the growing whole.

All this is to the good, and is the necessary sequel of advance. Through it we come to understand, into what richly-stored inheritances of knowledge, usefulness, and enjoyment we have entered, and how wondrous in resource, is the wisdom and love of our bounteous and all-glorious Lord.

It is possible to exaggerate the importance and value of the specialist, to the point of depreciating the contribution and service of the many. The world of thought and action owes more than can be told to the ministry of average gift. As the highest peaks of a mountainous district are made possible by the lower ranges out of which they rise, so the expert is made possible, because of the equally faithful, though less prominent contributions of the many.

Writing as we do here, with the Methodist ministry particularly, though not exclusively in view, we include the expert in his art, and also the man of average standard. In the Pauline sense of absorbing passion for the Person and programme of Jesus, we may all become experts, adopting his motto as ours, saying, "This one thing I do."[1]

In the spirit that longs for the widest recognition and the speedy enthronement of Jesus, we may all share the eager desire of Moses, saying, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit upon them!"[2] The truth is, the work and range of the preacher is so vast, that exaltation or depreciation of the human instrument runs the risk of misplaced emphasis, while forgetting the weightier considerations essential to success.

It is of the first importance that the preacher shall be possessed by his art, as a master passion. We place this as among the chief of what is sometimes vaguely spoken of as natural endowment.

[1] Phil. iii. 13. [2] Num. xi. 29.

Granted this, and much of what goes under the science of hermeneutics and homiletics may be left to take care of itself. Training can and will do much with the preacher's voice, with style, with the manner of delivery, even with the development of the personality that makes for pulpit effectiveness.

But nothing will atone for the lack of love for the work. In this sense, the preacher is born, not made. And out of it arises the sense of vocation, the assurance that this place of "God's speaking man," and no other, is the ordaining will of God for us. To be thus borne on toward the pulpit by a power outside ourselves, is to be in the true prophetic succession, for so were led all the prophets who were before us. The choice of the pulpit must never be a choice among equals, still less must it be in competition with other walks of life, as affording an easy way out. It must be this, or, "Woe is me!"[1]

Of all the pitiable objects in God's world, an ease-loving and idle minister is the most despicable, and of all tragedies over which surely angels weep, it is the sight of a preacher who dreads the opportunity of delivering his message, not because he feels the overwhelming greatness of truth, but because some other attraction outweighs the lure of the pulpit, or some stronger love absorbs both mind and heart.

The words of an acknowledged master of the modern pulpit—Dr. J. H. Jowett—to the students in Yale University may be cited, as a model within

[1] 1 Cor. ix. 16.

the reach of all:—"I love my calling. I have a growing delight in its services. I am conscious of no distractions in the shape of any competitors for my strength and allegiance. I have had but one passion, and I have lived for it, the absorbingly arduous yet glorious work of proclaiming the grace and love of our Lord Jesus Christ."[1]

2. And this love of teaching and enforcing the message of the gospel, must be like the love of the God who inspires it, unwasting in its strength, and unwearying in its service. It must be the fuel giving life and direction to our loftiest ideals. While receiving from all realms, and appreciating the glory of attainment in other ways of life, no achievement and no success gained by others in their own spheres, must ever diminish the glory of our art, or lower ideals that, like the horizon, widens as we travel toward it.

The prophet preacher will never stagnate, nor be content to repeat the messages of his yesterdays. Alive in every part, and keenly sensitive to the growing whole of truth, he will, seer-like, be always upon his watch tower, looking for and listening to the latest movement and message of God, that he may decipher its meaning to the modern mind and to the latest need.

3. To preserve the freshness and to maintain the level of the true ideal of preaching, the preacher must be, in the most intimate and sacred sense, "The Friend of God."[2] This need as distinguished from what we have already spoken of as natural

[1] *The Preacher: His Life and Work*, p. 3.
[2] Isa. xli. 8; James ii. 23.

endowment, is the Alpha and Omega of the preacher's equipment, and in order of importance, takes first place. Every preacher should covet the distinction which secures the title, "A great divine," not in the realm of theological science first, but in the more intimate and personal realm of inseparable friendship, with its unmistakable marks of spiritual culture, insight, and identity of aim.

It is not too much to say that this intimacy of relationship, more than any other condition, made the Hebrew prophet, and explains his easy supremacy over every other class of his time.

We may refer the reader to the fuller discussion of this aspect of the prophet's training in Chapter II, of this Lecture,[1] in justification of the statement now made. The outstanding personalities of the prophets reached the height and wrought the work they did, because, beyond any gift of nature, or acquirement of study, they were the confidants of God, living and moving in the rapture of closest companionship with the Divine.

And just because this truth touches conditions of attainment that do not and cannot change with time or place, it is not too much to add that it is thus, and in no other way, that the truly successful preacher is made.

Nor is this surprising when one gets down to the root meaning of the word, companion, as "one with whom we feed!" This goes far deeper than any question of study, or any acquisition of knowledge. The companionship of the man who will effectively

[1] pp. 27–33.

speak out to his age the mind of God, bespeaks such a constancy of communion with the eternal, that the character of the human medium takes the mould of the Divine. The whole bearing of such a preacher will suggest the strength and permanence of the Divine home in which he dwells.

In all this life of daily communion, living upon "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,"[1] the preacher must lead the way, and become the constant "example to his flock."[2] This will tell even more than his uttered word, and will serve to give the spoken message larger meaning and added weight. Such a life of entire absorption in God, and the things of God, means cost. To obtain possession of this chief pearl of entrance into the innermost sanctuary of the Divine secret, many a pearl of lesser value will have to be surrendered. It means paying the price of time, the expenditure of nerve force and soul force, the sacrifice of popular applause, the forfeiting of otherwise lawful hobbies and ambitions, even as, in every case, it meant all this and more for the prophets of Israel. We cannot secure the highest success on cheaper terms.

Let it be frankly said, the preacher can "get through" at lesser cost. But the risks of the lower level are tremendous. The whole ministry will be impoverished. From the triumphs of a prophetic ministry we shall descend to be the mere hucksters of sermons, lacking alike in strength and in saving grace. And the final cost may turn out after all

[1] Deut. viii. 3; Matt. iv. 4. [2] 1 Pet. v. 3.

to be the greater, involving possibly the price of life itself!

4. Yet all this intense absorption in the Person and programme of the Divine, must find its justification and its practical value in a more effective service of man. Of all men, the preacher can least afford to be regarded as one aloof from his fellows, viewing their struggles from afar, or as one whose relation to men is official and occasional. Even the appearance of such remoteness is fatal to success.

Beyond all others, the preacher must be "The Friend of Man," deserving the suggestive and honourable designation, "a great human," because of him it may be truly said, that

> "He to his heart with warm embrace hath taken,
> The universal sorrow of mankind,"

and that, like his Lord, he comes to rank as "chief of men," because he delights in the lowliness of ministry which makes him "servant of all." In a sense deeper than Pope meant, and for ends infinitely worthier, it is particularly true of the preacher, that

> "The proper study of mankind is man,"

and to that study he must gladly and constantly offer in willing sacrifice all the treasure of his heart and brain, entering into the significance of that fragment of our Lord's utterance not recorded in the Gospels, "It is more blessed to give than to receive."[1]

[1] Acts xx. 35.

But this too means cost. If, like his Lord, the preacher is to "know what is in man,"[1]—surely the elemental necessity for one whose life-work is the "cure of souls"—the training will be at once prolonged and severe. On the one side, it will be a constant trial of faith, as, again and again, he is compelled to face the downright perfidy and villainy to which human nature can descend, and of which it is capable.

On the other side, it will be a constant source of hope and joy as he marks the heights of nobility to which it can rise, and the ever unfolding greatness of the nature Christ died to save. It may be permitted a working minister to say, that often the preacher's heart sinks within him, as, after the most painstaking teaching and effort, he beholds the pitiful smallness of human nature, even religious human nature.

Yet again, the preacher knows the thrill of a joy like to the joy of his Lord, as he discovers in unexpected ways and places, treasure of rarest worth, fit to adorn the Redeemer's crown. And yet once more, the preacher who eagerly and unwearyingly works in the field of human experience, will find it perennially fruitful. It will be constantly supplying material, particularly illustration for his pulpit work. It will maintain his ministry in freshness, and give him incentive to work at his maximum of strength.

5. It follows inevitably that the preacher must be, and will remain to the end, a diligent and

[1] John ii. 25.

painstaking student. Always he will feel, with a distinguished President of the British Association of Science,[1] that, in respect of actual attainment, "the island of his knowledge is relatively small, and is surrounded by a vast ocean of the unknown." He will therefore set forth again and again to explore the unknown territories, that he may compel them to yield their treasures to the ever-insistent demands of his beloved art.

One cannot remain long in the company of the Hebrew prophets without being impressed that they were earnest and accurate students, sparing neither time nor pains, so that they could speak with clearness and with power the truth as they received and understood it. They were the theologians, the psychologists and philosophers of their day. And their range of knowledge in these realms of truth remains even yet the admiration and the pattern of the modern preacher.

For his own incentive and guidance, the preacher will often recall the nature and range of the studies with which the minds of the Hebrew prophets were concerned. (1) To know God, and to be the authoritative exponents of His Divine purposes, alike to Israel, and to the larger world outside; (2) to know man, his emotions and yearnings, his hopes and fears, his strength and weakness, his capacity for splendid attainment, making him a true son of God, his possible depths of treachery; (3) to know life and interpret it, being the first to

[1] Lord Salisbury.

supply the world with a true philosophy of unmistakable history, revealing its unchanging laws, its tendencies, its subtle play of alternatives, and, beyond all, its Divine, far-reaching plan. These were the realms in which these ancient students worked. Of these studies they never tired. Concerning them, their knowledge broadened "from precedent to precedent," until they stood as experts and authorities, the true teachers of their own, and of each succeeding age.

And these are still the realms within which the preacher must diligently work, and concerning which he must not allow the most advanced of his congregation to excel him.

So far as strength and opportunity allows, he must have an eye upon every field of truth. All knowledge is grist to his mill. He cannot afford to be an entire stranger to anything that will assist his intellectual enlargement. Knowledge and the preacher must be lovers true, inseparable in companionship, never exchanging glance or word except on terms of intimate affection.

Even so, however, the working minister, having upon him "the care of all the churches,"[1] having regard also to considerations of health, and to the limitations of time, will be reluctantly compelled to leave many a specialized and attractive field of study as the favourite ground of some in his congregation, and, in such realms, especially in these later days, the preacher will at once allow, that he is easily outstripped.

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 28.

Yet, we repeat, on the themes of God, Man, Life, on all the practical questions arising out of his gospel,[1]—to use Paul's phrase—the preacher must excel and be first among equals. This is only what is asked of the man of business, of letters, of art, and even when the preacher has done this so well that he is an acknowledged master of his science, what does he more than others ?

On this whole question, a teacher universally trusted and loved—the late Principal of Mansfield College—has spoken so wisely, and with all his usual grasp, that we venture to reproduce his words here, as being particularly appropriate to our immediate time :—

> "Our unsolved practical problems are an innumerable multitude ; while the speculative problems which are the vital factors of our practical, form a vaster multitude still. And without the Church neither can be solved ; and the Church cannot solve them apart from the reason and the speech it uses to persuade men. (i) There are large questions as to the Scriptures :—how they came to be and when ; what is the text and who are the authors of the books ; what is the relation of the narratives they embody to older narratives ; what the books severally and as a whole mean, whether we can still speak of them as a revelation, and claim for them the rank of authorities in religion. (ii.) Then there are large questions as to Christian doctrine :—whether God exists,

[1] Rom. ii. 16.

and whether He created and now rules; how the ideas of creation and growth are related, whether they are contradictory, complementary, or mutually supersessive; how we are to conceive God, whether as solitary or as social; how we are to conceive Christ, whether as God or as man, or as both; and if as both, in what way are His natures related. And how man is to be conceived, whether as mortal or immortal, whether as individual or as race, whether as, by birth, sinless or sinful, whether as worth redeeming or as infinitely worthless. (iii.) And along with these go problems, innumerable and profound, which may be termed ethical, as belonging to applied Christian thought:—how best such thought may be made to permeate and guide, to organize and control the individual, society, and the state; whether it has anything to say to our industrial confusions and conflicts, our economic perplexities and fiscal distress, our political parties and national ambitions."[1]

6. While it is true that the knowledge of the preacher, ever-growing, ever-changing, will, from time to time require the re-statement and often the re-setting of truth, it is also true, and a further essential of his equipment, that he shall come to be known as a man of intense conviction, and of fearless courage. Only so, will he be counted worthy to stand in the succession of the prophets,

[1] Fairbairn's *Studies in Religion and Theology*, pp. 419–20.

or his ministry deserve the designation of being truly "prophetic."

Even in the questions last mentioned by Dr. Fairbairn, as the preacher applies the ethics of Jesus to "our economic perplexities and fiscal distress, our political parties and national ambitions," he must fearlessly and dogmatically insist in urging the use of the Golden Rule, and the broad-based principles of righteousness upon which everywhere and always Christ laid emphasis. Concerning "industrial conflicts and political parties," it may often be that the preacher will not possess the technical knowledge to decide, nor should he ever bring the pulpit down to the arena of party political strife. Enough for him to enunciate the principles of justice and truth upon which his gospel securely rests.

But upon the eternal things of his Gospel, when he is dealing, as in the main he will be, with the great themes of God, Man, Sin, Redemption, Character-Building, Conduct, the preacher must speak "as one having authority." It will be here that Conviction will inspire Confidence. "Whether the people will hear, or whether they will forbear, yet (they) shall know that there hath been a prophet among them,"[1] seeing that the message carries the prophetic ring of absolute sincerity, the conviction born of first-hand knowledge, and the personal experience of its power. The preacher must be beyond alike the fear of man's displeasure, and the weakness of man's flattery. If the suspicion

[1] Ezek. ii. 5.

is created that he considers mere position, or trims to any particular individual prejudice, then he loses even where he hoped to gain, and no one will lament his ruin as a "speaker for God."

If, when the preacher has faithfully delivered his message, some members of his congregation shall threaten to withhold their support, or decide to refuse attendance upon a ministry so heart-searching, then happy is the preacher who, reviewing the substance of his message, can say without boast or regret:—"I hold not my life of any account, as dear unto myself, so that I may accomplish my course, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."[1]

7. Unyielding in conviction and fearless in utterance, the preacher must be a pattern of the gentleness that makes the truly great,[2] winning and inspiring men by "the meekness and gentleness of Christ,"[3] skilled in the art of helpful sympathy, and known as one who can be trusted with the deepest confidences of the human heart.

The preacher who will stand in the succession of the prophets, and discharge a ministry truly prophetic, must therefore possess as an essential of his equipment, the vicarious spirit and outlook, being, for the sake of others, "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." This is, in part, the meaning of what is significantly called, "the prophet's burden," being, beyond others, a man of the people, "moved with compassion for them"

[1] Acts xx. 24. [2] Ps. xviii. 35. [3] 2 Cor. x. 1.

—being down in the swim with them—"because they are distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd,"[1] and constantly taking their cares and longings to his heart, as though they were his own.

In this respect, the life of the preacher-prophet, like that of his Hebrew prototype, will be for the most part lonely, his experience being the more tragic, that it is so largely borne in secret, and cannot be generally understood. He will inspire confidence, and will in turn, from time to time—without requiring or desiring it, and certainly with no accompaniment of priestly pretensions—receive confidences he will carry deep and secret as the grave. Yet none will know the cost by which this ability to receive the secrets of men has been won, nor understand the agony he endures, as, more than others, he sees and knows and feels the evil of the world.

But it is not alone the evil he is pledged to fight, which constitutes "the burden of the prophet," and for which he vicariously suffers; it is on God's account, and for the sake of the truth men despise and cast out, that he treads the winepress of sorrow, and drinks in secret the cup of bitterness. This was the greater part of the burden shared in turn by each of the prophets of Israel. We have seen how, through the poignancy of his own rejected love, Hosea threw up the sympathy of his sorrow-stricken heart to the Eternal Love, as he hears God cry out:—"How shall I give thee up,

[1] Matt. ix. 36.

Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?"[1] "Though I have taught and strengthened their arms, yet do they imagine mischief against me. They return, but not to him that is on high."[2]

It is before the mystery of this human wilfulness, spurning the omnipotence of Infinite Love, and preferring the husks of the world's emptiness, that the preacher bows in prostrate agony before God. Often and often as he descends the pulpit stair, and returns humiliated and dejected to pass a sleepless night, in the consciousness of failure to win a verdict for his Lord, he cries out "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?"[3] This too is part of "the burden of the prophet." No true preacher can escape it. Indeed, he will not wish to escape it. In this way, he is constantly making "acquaintance with grief." Grieved for the people whose refusal of the word of life has strengthened the might of evil; grieved for the truth deserving so much more and better of himself and his people; grieved beyond all, for His Master's sorrow and His Master's loss. The preacher who knows nothing, or feels infrequently, this agony of the rejected Cross, should examine his credentials afresh, and tremble lest he should gravitate to the ranks of those who "prophesy for hire."[4]

8. When we pass to affirm as a further essential to the equipment of the preacher, that he must, of all men, possess an unconquerable faith, a radiant hope, a sunny and winsome disposition, making

[1] Hosea xi. 8. [2] Hosea vii. 15. [3] Isa. liii. 1. [4] Micah iii. 11.

him as he faces his work, "an incurable optimist," we are not conscious of any contradiction or confusion either of fact or statement, least of all do we ignore the truth of vicarious suffering just discussed. We are but stating its logical, its only possible issue. It is indeed, because of the distinctiveness and supremacy of his faith, "as seeing him who is invisible,"[1] that he is able to "endure."

The writer to the Hebrews supplies the commentary to this concluding section of our study, when, in citing the unequalled and unapproachable example of our Lord's vicarious life and work, in speech unmatched for suggestion and beauty, he links the suffering and the joy:—"Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame."[2]

Yet more. We reverently pass at once to the experience of Him who is the Redeemer, and also the lofty pattern for the preacher. The nearer Jesus travelled to His Gethsemane, the more He increased the emphasis upon His joy.[3] It was then, that so far from speaking as one depressed, He rang out for Himself, and for His followers, His loftiest song of triumph.[4]

That the preacher should pass in and out among men, and amidst the often depressing scenes of his work, as one who understands the music and healing of the merry heart,[5] and who rays out sunshine as he walks, is only what men should be led to expect. Where he comes, hope should be

[1] Heb. xi 27. [2] Heb. xii. 2. [3] John xvi. 20, 22, 23; xvii. 13. [4] John xvi. 33. [5] Prov. xvii. 22.

left as a lane of light-beams, and the incentive to the braver endurance or the victorious effort should follow as an inevitable sequel.

For is he not the specialist of hope? Does he not live to expound a gospel, which, in its essence as in its goal, is the death of despair, nay more, of death itself? Does he not live by his faith? And is not his the faith in the assured victory of good over evil, of truth over every kind of falsehood? By reason of such a faith, and as the issue of it, does he not always behold the coming dawn, stretching on to the eternal noon of the day of God? Is it conceivable that one, whose joyous work it is to announce a marriage, the eternal union and victory of the good, should carry before men a gloomy countenance, or appear unto men as those who fast? [1]

It was the possession of this deathless hope and the exercise of this unconquerable faith which sustained the prophets. This gave them their elevation and power over their own time and people, and made them rank with the loftiest teachers of the race.

We have already pointed out[2] how it carried forward and secured the growth of the Messianic hope in Israel, by which, even in the darkest days of the exile, the consciousness of destiny was kept alive, and victory was wrested from seeming defeat.

We too have recently passed through our baptism of blood. In the agony caused by the "greatest war in history," we have experienced a "trial of

[1] John iii. 29; Matt. ix. 15. [2] See pp. 107–27.

faith" without parallel in the memory of living man. Yet we have had no eclipse of the best things, such as that witnessed by Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel or second Isaiah. Even in the "darkness which might be felt," these prophets saw the coming day, and in the midnight of their sorrow, they sang their most jubilant and triumphant song of victory.

By their faith they conquered. Their faith compelled their optimism, and their optimism became the invincible credential to the validity of their faith.

Here then it is, ignoring the separating centuries and the distinctions of East and West, that the modern preacher joins hand and heart with the Hebrew prophet. Sons of the same hope are they, comrades in the same holy service, believers in the same assurance of victory because of "that Messiah who has indeed now come,"[1] and who in a very real sense is always coming.

Yet with an emphasis impossible to the loftiest prophet of old, and with a conviction born of unmistakable history, the modern preacher may the more confidently face his day of trial, and ring out above all the discordant notes of his age the music of final triumph.

For in these later days He to whom the prophets witnessed, and who is the highest revelation of God, has given to us this gracious and welcome assurance—at once a promise of power and a pledge of victory—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[2]

[1] John iv. 25. [2] Matt. xxviii. 20.

CHAPTER XI.

The Preacher and the Church.

WHEN we were discussing the relation of the preacher to the conditions and claims of our modern life,[1] we confined our treatment of the theme to the need and call of the world outside the Church. The limitation, though intentional at that point, cannot be allowed to remain. It requires the correction and enlargement which the present examination seeks to supply.

Using the term now in its most Catholic interpretation, the Church is so essential a part of our modern life, and stands in such a redeeming relation to it, that no attempt to understand the modern position or need can be successful, which ignores its ministry and witness.

It is part of the prevailing habit and temper to speak slightingly of the Church, and to depreciate the value of its work. Yet it cannot be denied that the Church, while not of the world, is in the world as the mediator of the Divine Spirit, and as an appointed channel of Divine answer and healing.

[1] See pp. 198–210.

It is only as we carefully examine and attempt to appreciate its appointed place, that we are in a position to praise or blame. As yet, the severest critic of the Church has not been able to offer the world a more competent instrument of human progress.

This study is further required as we consider the position of the modern preacher. He stands in a relation of the closest intimacy to the Church, receiving his commission through the Church as sealing and confirming the Divine call to preach. As one "deriving all his ministerial status from the Church, at no time and in no point independent of or above her, he is her representative and her organ in a very special way."[1] And thus there is established as between Church and preacher reciprocal obligations and duties equally sacred and binding upon both.

But before we proceed to define the nature of these obligations and duties, it will be useful to go back to the standpoint of our studies in the earlier part of this lecture.

In some essential features the Hebrew prophet and the modern preacher, though living and working under conditions entirely unlike, are yet closely and permanently related. Both receive their call from God. Both are primarily responsible to Him. In their fearlessness and courage, in their spiritual freedom and directness of access to God,

[1] Quoted from Dr. A. S. Peake's valuable article on *Methodist Union*. See *Methodist Recorder* for July 7, 1921, p. 4. The whole article will repay careful study.

in their passionate zeal for the Divine honour, the modern preacher may claim equality of right and duty with the ancient prophet.

Where the Divine voice is clearly heard in the secret temple of the soul, neither the Hebrew prophet nor his modern successor could consent to any limitation of the liberty of prophesying.

It can never be too often urged, that loyalty to the Divine direction, and faithfulness in the discharge of Divine duty, may sometimes require serious divergence from the prevailing ecclesiastical order, and even rebuke or denunciation of existing religious practice. As when Amos, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, withstood priestly claims, or our own Bunyan insisted on his right to preach, even when Church authority forbade. Obedience to the Divine will is always the governing factor, and represents a court of decision from which there is no appeal.

The conditions of the ancient and modern world, which, as we have already pointed out, were so different, make it difficult to carry the parallel much further. There is a certain independence belonging to the coming and going of the Hebrew prophet that the modern preacher may not claim. That is partly due to the fact that he lived and moved in times when society, so to say, was in the making, and organization was almost unknown.

Religion was there, and the religious bond, but —as among all primitive peoples—it was the bond of the clan, the tribe, the nation. And, right on through all the pre-exilic times, it was the nation, not the Church, that counted. Even the temple

of Solomon, while it gave great importance to Jerusalem, and required a numerous body of officials and a succession of priests, yet did not create a Jewish Church. It is true that Isaiah received his call and went forth to his prophetic mission from the temple, and the worship of the temple, yet the temple authorities of that day neither commissioned him, nor received him. Like the rest of the prophets, he carried forward his work in the face of opposition from recognized ecclesiastical circles.

Up to the time of the discovery of the law by Hilkiah, under Josiah, in the days of Jeremiah, worship still went on at different shrines, and side by side with the worship of the heathen cults. So little do we know of any ecclesiastical order in pre-exilic days, that anything like dogmatism is impossible.

It has been truly said that "out of the ruins of a nation there came a Church." And from the later days of the exile, and the period following the exile, we may see the rise and trace the growth of that great Jewish organization which was destined to prepare the way for the universal Christian Church, in whose interests we are permitted to live and work.

It does not fall within the scope of this chapter to follow the movement of which Ezekiel is the great prophetic leader. Much had led up to it. While the discovery of the Law had given Jerusalem and the temple a religious supremacy entirely unshared, and an exclusive position as to the

offering of sacrifice, the exile, and the years that followed, had given to the Scriptures—the Law and the Prophets—a supremacy hitherto unknown. It had created the need for study and teaching, for schools and teachers, hence the work of rabbi and scribe. Hence too, the rise of the "synagogue" where worship could be regularly carried on, apart from the recurring annual feasts at Jerusalem.

The need of the time—as always in the providence of God—supplied the man. No greater service was ever rendered a people, than that which was so freely given by Ezekiel. Israel, no longer a nation, having learned by the bitter experiences of captivity, the folly of rejecting God, the remnant was fitted to become what God had always desired them to be, a true Theocracy, a people of God, for God.

What they needed for the new order in Palestine and elsewhere, scattered as they would be henceforth, was a religious constitution, by which there could be embodied and passed on to succeeding generations, the truths and laws by which man everywhere truly lives. And as Dr. Skinner says: "It was fitting that this new era of religion should be inaugurated through the agency of one who combined in his own person the conservative instincts of the priest with the originality and spiritual intuition of the prophet."[1]

This valuable contribution of Ezekiel to his own and to all succeeding time is permanently enshrined in the nine concluding chapters of the

[1] *Ezekiel.* Expos. Bible, p. 389.

book which bears his name.[1] The goal of all Divine effort, alike for the individual life and for the world, is contained in the closing sentence of the book, setting forth the name by which the city of God's desire is to be known, "Yahweh-Shammah," "The Lord is there."[2]

The name sets forth a longing and describes a character. With this as a key, the modern preacher will find in the otherwise dreary detail of these chapters, untold wealth of sermon material. Here is sketched the possibility of that state, which, apart from the reigning, transforming power of God's redeeming presence, will always remain a disappointing dream, a hopeless fancy. Here is the programme of the truer socialism, the only socialism that either can or ought to be.

1. It is with this glorious vision of Ezekiel as a setting and background, that we may now proceed to the work of this chapter. Keeping in view the picture of this "high churchman"[3] of the Old Testament, and remembering the enriched content supplied by Him, who in the New Testament filled in the outline and surpassed it, we are justified in assuming and pleading for a high doctrine of the Church.

2. For while it is true that Jesus spoke chiefly of the Kingdom, and neither created any external organization nor left any instructions or rules for its management—except indeed, the law of love[4]—the Church was implicit in the Kingdom, and was intended as the essential instrument of its spread.

[1] Ezek. xl.–xlviii. [2] Ezek. xlviii. 35.
[3] *Peake's Commentary*, p. 91. [4] John xiii. 35.

That Jesus refrained from establishing any such external society, and that He left His religion free to adapt itself to the inevitable changes of time, of place, of variety of temperament, is evidence of His unique position as claiming universal rule. The Kingdom sought, only in a larger and better way, the Theocracy of Ezekiel's vision. Its aim was the establishment of God's reign everywhere. It sought all men and embraced all time. And it was impossible that any external organization could be permanently fitted to be the embodiment of ideals so inward and spiritual.

It is easy for us to see this now in the light of later knowledge and the teaching of history. But that Jesus saw it and acted upon it, leaves us in no doubt as to His Divine nature and His place in history. Only Deity could have entrusted the whole fortunes of His Kingdom to this one touch-stone and talisman, "for my sake,"[1] relying only on the loyalty of lovers. Looking over it all, and remembering the results still flowing from it, we find Paul's glowing language the most fitting expression of the heart: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out."[2]

It was then the ideal of the Kingdom—the true Theocracy—as embodied in the Person, the teaching, the life and death of Jesus, that created the Church as the visible organ of the Kingdom. This is the germ of that teaching which finds its ablest

[1] Matt. x. 39. [2] Rom. xi. 33.

and worthiest expositor in Paul, whose doctrine of the Church forms our standard literature on the theme, and should be treasured as a most precious inheritance.

Paul too, was a high churchman, and always stood for the sacred character of the Church. How eagerly he pleaded for its unshared supremacy, how jealously he guarded its honour, how untiringly he laboured for its success! And while Paul, more than any apostle, had to do with the gradually developing organization of the early Church, repeatedly discussing it in his letters;[1] while he, more than others, was honoured in founding churches, yet he always distinguishes between the Church as the spiritual organ of Christ's activity—the body of Christ[2]—and the external instrument through which He works.

It is a distinction of the first importance, and should be always steadily borne in mind. Especially in these days when we are being driven back upon the questions of Church origins, organization, and unity. Take the phrase just referred to—a favourite expression of Paul—and examine the classic passage where the phrase occurs, and where he is discussing the question of unity.[3] His emphasis here is not, as in the discussions in Romans xii. or 1 Corinthians xii. upon questions of external organization or variety of service and office in the community of believers. It is much more inward, spiritual, dealing with essences, not forms. Examine

[1] Rom. xii. 6–8; 1 Cor. x.–xii.
[2] Eph. i. 23; iv. 4, 12; Col. i. 18; ii. 17. [3] Eph. iv. 4.

the sevenfold enumeration of Ephesians iv. 4:—"One body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." The most outward and material term in this perfect group of seven is the term "body." But is not this "body" the sum total of Christ-loving men, women, and children, all the world over, and throughout all time? Is not *this* the Church Christ loved, and for which He gave Himself up?[1] And is not this the Church He redeems, "that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish?"[2] And is not this Catholic view the fruit of Christ's own teaching:—"For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."[3]

3. This brief examination of a profoundly important theme, supplies us with the material for maintaining a high doctrine of the Church even as an external organization, and enables us rightly to urge the supreme place of the churches in the life of the world and of men. Seeing that the Church visible is the necessary outcome and the appointed instrument of the Church spiritual and invisible, the organ of the body of Christ, every question touching the Church is important, and all its ministries, appointments, and activities, share a significance and value belonging to the Divine source from which it comes. As an idea and as an institution, it is supreme, holy, Divine.

[1] Eph. v. 25. [2] Eph. v. 27. [3] Mark iii. 35.

The Spirit of Jesus is its life. The teaching of Jesus is its pattern and rule of conduct. The life of Jesus is its unchanging law. The death, and triumphant victory of Jesus over death, supplies the secret strength of its redeeming ministry, and is the unfailing pledge of final supremacy.

Being visible, it is, as to organization, management and regulation, pliable, adaptable, subject to the inevitable changes of locality, condition, and time. Being visible too, it will, when the Kingdom has fully come, pass with the things that pass, having done its work. It is this high doctrine of the Church, alike as to its origin, its mission, and its destiny, for which we must ever plead, and which, against all opposition, we must steadfastly maintain.

4. The Church as an institution created by Christ and ruled by Him, endowed with the illuminating presence and the unlimited power of the Holy Spirit, is ideally the true Vicar of Christ upon earth. It is an ideal the sanctity and splendour of which, every member of it should cherish and strive to reach. As Dr. Fairbairn long ago taught us:—"The Church ought to be the incarnation of Christ, as Christ was the incarnation of God." In place of the modern tendency and practice of depreciating the place and function of the Church, we should be busy demanding for it the place it fills in the thought and programme of its Lord.

5. Inherent in this view of the Church, is the secret of its possible unrivalled authority. An

authority derived from its Divine head, conveyed to no priestly class—for each member in it is equally a priest before God, representing God to man, and man to God—and resting in and with the Church, on the sole condition of loyalty to its Head. It is not too much to say, that had the true unity and loyalty of the Church been maintained, then the Church would have been a power in the world as real and as irresistible as the Omnipotence of God.

Nor is it difficult to define the nature and sphere of the authority which is the birthright and privilege of the Church to exercise as the visible body of Christ, and for which a truly prophetic ministry will always plead. The authority of—

(1) Spiritual insight and instruction lead the way. When Peter, touching the highest point his faith had as yet reached, and, in the light of the clear illumination such faith revealed, made his great confession of Jesus, as the Christ, "the Son of the Living God,"[1] he opened the door to that fact of our Lord's true Messiahship upon which the Church securely rests. It was the master idea of the spiritual kingdom, and opened the way to all its treasures.

We are here dealing with the Church as the spiritual teacher and guide of men. The critical questions involved, and the long controversies that have followed concerning the power of the "keys,"[2] are outside our purpose. All kingdoms are opened by the keys of master ideas.

[1] Matt. xvi. 16. [2] Matt. xvi. 19.

And since spiritual truth, the knowledge of God, of Jesus as the revealer of God, of Man, of Life and Immortality, forms the master light of all our seeing, and the inspiration to all right doing, it follows that the Church holds the secret of the world's true illumination and instruction.

To whom is still committed the power of the keys opening the doors of sealed kingdoms? By whom are such keys used, applying the truth to any realm we will? Is it not to ardent lovers? to eager and persistent students? to those who, knocking with a determination that takes no refusal, and overcoming every resistance by yet greater effort, are rewarded with the unqualified welcome which says:—"Be it unto thee even as thou wilt!" No kingdom is hermetically sealed to the eagerness of love.

It is for just such an authority of spiritual guidance and illumination that our bewildered generation waits. Since the days of Peter's confession, there has been no greater opportunity than now for the one who knows and possesses the mind of Christ. And while the opportunity for the spiritual instructor, skilled in the secrets of God, is open to all disciples who qualify in the university of affection for Jesus, it is for the experts of the pulpit to lead the way. But the price of leadership for the pulpit, as in other realms, is the passion of love, and the knowledge which comes of love's compelling power. The preacher must never be less than the prophet.

The world of our time, burdened with a consciousness of need and ignorance before which all the

philosophies of men are helpless, is turning away in a disappointment bordering on despair, from long trusted leaders and systems. May we not truthfully say, that the condition of the world, and the fulness of time, has created the demand for a ministry truly prophetic?

And not the world only, but the Church itself needs such a ministry for its own quickening and inspiration. In this respect, the words of Prof. Jordan, written in the opening years of the present century, have acquired a new significance and value: "The Church needs many gifts to minister to her varied life, but without prophetic men she cannot live at all in any valid sense; without men inspired and inspiring she declines into a mere machine, and a machine can never represent the living Christ."[1]

(2) The Church is further called to exercise the authority of Moral and Spiritual leadership. It is or should be the incarnate conscience of the community. It should act as the Divine search-light for the world, penetrating to every realm and to every individual, always rebuking the wrong, always revealing the infallible standard of conduct. This authority is implicit in the sovereignty and victory of Jesus, who, as the sole Head of the Church, seeks, that He may obtain, the undivided allegiance of universal man.

Such a view represents a claim and should stand for a fact, which at once and for ever removes the Church from the controversies, either of states, or

[1] *Prophetic Ideas*, p. 362.

of parties, or of creeds. The Church cannot be a part of any state, or subservient to any, for she knows no state as such, any more than she knows colour or sex. The view or the practice which would reduce the Church to the control of the state, humiliates the Church, while it robs the state of the authority it has put in chains. The Church is above all states, and, while at the service of all, is always the law for them all.

Similarly, to associate the Church with any political, social, or economic school, is to degrade her sovereignty as the incarnate conscience of the community, and reduce her to the position of the chieftain of a particular section or clan. Political parties, social distinctions and economic theories, like man-made creeds, are always subject to revision, to the fickle changes of passing moods, or to the merciful oblivion of the scrap-heap. The heterodoxy of to-day becomes the orthodoxy of to-morrow, and that again is repudiated later as a creed outworn. All of which should serve as a warning against the tendency to identify the aims and mission of the Church with the partial and changing views of men.

The Church is in its spirit as timeless and changeless as its Lord. It is universal in its love of men. It remains unaffected by the clash of human opinion, and will abide until the last unit of the race has heard the voice of the Son of God.

Part of the work of truly prophetic preaching is to plead for, and seek to make actual this moral and spiritual leadership of our modern world.

Such leadership is inherent in the very standing and mission of the Church. The voice of the Church should be to men as the voice of God, authoritative, compelling, final. Such an authority rests not upon claim, but upon character. It resides not in any individual, however gifted or prominent. Nor does it proceed from any given locality, such as Rome or Canterbury. It belongs rather to the corporate personality of the whole community of Christians, each translating the mind and deed of Christ in daily life, and so creating the atmosphere, and insisting upon the ethic, by which wrong everywhere is condemned, and righteousness is exalted as the one thing needful.

The Canaan of God's desire for humanity will only be reached as the Church becomes the pillar of cloud and fire, preceding and accompanying the slow-moving, upward march of men. Without such leadership, nations, like individuals, do not truly live. They exist. And existence degenerates into a vulgar and pitiful scramble for supremacy, ending in dishonour and failure.

Seeing that only to the Church, among the institutions of the world, is committed this authority and privilege of spiritual leadership, it is out of this view that there springs the most insistent and urgent demand for closer unity. The present divided condition of Christendom, at this late date of the world's life, is a scandal. For the division is still, in many quarters, a contention and a rivalry on the part of those who should be agreed and busy in the higher business of getting God's will done on

earth. Moreover, the division weakens the witness of the Church, and her voice of commanding authority is feeble or lost, in the divided counsels of those who should speak as one. For the lack of such commanding utterance the Church has often been discounted and humiliated before the world.

Of this humiliation, the recent world-war afforded a tragic example. There were critical periods during those awful years when the world waited for a moral lead. Such a lead would probably have saved untold wealth, alike of men and material, and shortened the period of the world agony. Yet while each communion and every Church longed for peace, and was eager to ensure it, we were too divided to count in the counsels of the world.

It is the reproach of the Church, and an illustration of the folly of our divisions, that the one manifesto which sounded forth the high moral note, and, while not condemning the war, pointed out possible avenues of peace, came from outside the Church. The voice that—with an eloquence worthy of the best Roman or Grecian oracles—arrested the attention of the world, and submitted the "points" which ultimately led to counsels of conciliation, travelled across the Atlantic from one, who, though for the moment discounted, will some day be adjudged as a prophet of his generation.

The authority for which we have pleaded is strikingly set forth in the introduction of a book deserving deep and earnest study, written by a leader of thought whose contributions we shall greatly

miss in the difficult days ahead:—"It is the company of the Saints that shall judge the civilizations of the world, fixed in faith's everlasting seat, and sure in the re-creative Word."[1]

(3) Beyond all, the Church must declare her authority, and prove her right to supremacy, by the ministry of Redeeming service. It is in the actual work of saving men, and going about, like the Son of Man, "doing good" that the Church will become both the instructor and the leader of the world. Happily the signs are abundant that more and more the Church will be henceforth engaged on the practical work of "the Father's business."

It is perhaps, as yet, too much to hope that the Church has seen her last serious division, though happily, all the present indications encourage such a hope. Our point of view has changed. The Bible, and the faith it inspires, around which such long and bitter controversies have raged, is now better understood, and, thanks to modern scholarship, is made so much more reasonable. Let it not be thought that we are indifferent to questions of theology and doctrine. We are profoundly concerned with them. The difference is, that we no longer discuss these in order that they may be formulated into a creed, but rather that they may aid us the more accurately to interpret the Divine purpose, and get God's will done. We are concerned less with speculation, and more interested in service. We are more tolerant with difference

[1] Principal Forsyth's *Theology in Church and State*, p. 25.

of view, that we may the more eagerly agree around the healing Cross.

This intensely practical temper and bent of the Church is all to the good. It is of the very essence of the gospel, and the gospel in its saving and redeeming power. The ministry of the Church is supremely a sacrificial ministry. It is this aspect of it which gives the Church its distinctive place and invests it with a greatness entirely unshared. We must steadily and persistently keep to the front the truth, that we are not called to entertain men, but to save them. Our work as churches is not the exposition of theories, economic, social, or religious. It is the urgent and ever wonderful declaration of the fact of Redeeming Love, going to the uttermost of sacrifice, that salvation may be to the uttermost of human need. Only let us be true to these notes and forces of the Church, and we shall so help to secure its place and establish its supremacy in the life of men, that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."[1]

6. It is into the service of such a Church that the preacher is called, and for whose honour, extension, and final victory he must labour to the last ounce of his strength. This at once defines the nature and scope of our discussion concerning the relation of the preacher to the Church. His call to preach receives the confirmation of the Church. His appointment and solemn ordination to its service, and through it to the service of God and man, is by the permission and order of the Church.

[1] Matt. xvi. 18.

The true safeguard against high clerical or sacerdotal pretensions is to be found in maintaining a high doctrine of the Church. If we regard the Church as it is affectionately described by Paul, as "the body and the bride of Christ," and if every member of the body is the "brother, sister and mother" of its great Head,[1] there can be no right, nor privilege, nor authority belonging to any separated class within it, which is not equally open to all. Every believer, that is to say, every member of this mystical body is equally a priest unto God, called to the holy ministry of representing God to man, and man to God.

There is plenty of room within that view for a high doctrine of the Church. There is none whatever for a high clerical view of the ministry. The thought of lording it over God's heritage,[2] or of ministerial prerogative, or of putting on airs as one superior, will be offensive and painful to one whose chief desire is to make himself "an example to the flock."[3] "It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master,"[4] and He was "in the midst of us as he that serveth."[5] Paul and Apollos are "but ministers through whom ye believed."[6] The qualifying term of Paul's comparison is in order to the exaltation of Christ, and the value of winning new witnesses for Him. Where the greatness of service is recognized, where the responsibility of the watchman's post is felt, and where the office of guardian is lovingly cherished, there will be no

[1] Matt. xii. 50. [2] 1 Pet. v. 3. [3] 1 Peter v. 3.
[4] Matt. x. 25. [5] Luke xxii. 27. [6] 1 Cor. iii. 5.

desire to make claims, nor will there be any thought of mere position or authority.

7. It is from such a view as is here presented that we reach the truly worthy and lofty estimate of the pastoral office. While the preacher, even as His Lord, will always look out upon men as "sheep not having a shepherd,[1]" and will consider the world as his field,[2] yet the Church will be his special care, and all its interests the object of his immediate and constant solicitude. And while the range of his sympathetic and prayerful concern will embrace the Church Catholic—the whole Church as the bride of Christ—elemental honesty will compel him to give to the Church that has called and ordained him, and which has entered into certain obligations on his behalf, his first and unceasing attention.

Certain specific considerations will now follow :—

(1) The preacher will take to his heart, and will work for and seek to promote, the purity and honour of the Church. This will be as dear and as sacred to him as his own honour. If its purity is ever marred, or its fair fame threatened, he will feel it as a personal blow, and will sorrow that the general impact of his witness as the representative of the Church has been weakened. He will be the severest mentor and critic of his own bearing and speech and deed, constantly judging himself, "giving no occasion of stumbling in anything, that our ministration be not blamed."[3]

He will constantly hold up before his people the

[1] Matt. ix. 36. [2] Matt. xiii. 38. [3] 2 Cor. vi. 3.

loftiest ethical and spiritual ideals, and will utterly refuse to accommodate his standards of teaching to those of his flock who may find the doctrine hard, or who criticize it as impracticable.

Taking as his standard, the great teaching of the letter to the Ephesians, he will jealously guard and unwearingly work to preserve the dignity of the Church as there set forth. He will make the longing and activity of Jesus his own, and will so labour that the joy of his Lord may be realized, when He will "present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy, and without blemish."[1]

(2) The desire and purpose of the preacher will go beyond this, and will reach forth to the positive insistence upon the distinctiveness and beauty of Christian culture. As upon the finished work of the pillars in the porch of Solomon's temple was the beauty of "lily work,"[2] so the preacher will pray and work that "the beauty of the Lord" may be seen in every feature of the Christian character. He will look for and demand the "more than others" of Christian discipleship, and will make his people quite familiar with the doctrine of the "second mile."[3]

The world must be trained to expect from the Church the finest specimens of true culture. The beauty of the Christian disposition and service must be so compelling as to need neither claim nor announcement, yet once seen, will secure the

[1] Eph. v. 27. [2] 1 Kings vii. 22. [3] Matt. v. 41.

admiration which is never far removed from worship. And the preacher will watch for this as one who "must give account."[1] The picture of it will be before him as he prepares his sermons. When he beholds signs of its appearing in his members, he will rejoice as a gardener who has lovingly watched a tender plant, and is made glad in the assurance of coming beauty. The time is ripe for a truly prophetic ministry devoted to preaching the gospel of grace and charm.

(3) And it is all that the preacher may help to secure the increase and victory of the Church as the "bride" of his Lord. The preacher lives for the conquest of the Church. Under the pressure of the "pierced hand," he has deliberately and finally abandoned the ideals and pursuits of other men that he may devote himself to this. And, seeing he has laid hold of the "kingdom that cannot be shaken,"[2] his aims are the greatest of all men, and the object of his pursuits the most ambitious. He does not need to depreciate the conquests of other realms, nor speak of them as unworthy. The conquest for which he lives is away from all competition and comparison. As his successes are assured, all other legitimate conquests are made worthier still.

And the preacher is the more intent on his business, as he remembers the truth emphasized by Sir Robertson Nicoll in his book, entitled *Princes of the Church*. "The world is increased by every being born into it, but the Church has no natural

[1] Heb. xiii. 17. [2] Heb. xii. 28.

increase, only a supernatural. The Church lives by capture, by booty, by winning over from the world the citizens that make her number." Nor is the preacher content so long as a single unit remains outside the fold.

8. While the Church expects from the preacher that he will give himself without reserve to the promotion of her peace and true prosperity, the preacher has the right to look for generous loyalty on the part of the Church. Wilfully to neglect either co-operation in service, or generosity of support, is criminal. It impairs the honour and fair name of the Church. Paul is here also our greatest teacher, and out of his experience of the ignorance and selfishness, the culture and overflowing generosity of the churches of his day, he has made abundantly clear in his writings, what is the duty of the Church to those upon whom it has laid hands, and of whom it rightly expects so much. We go back to experiences such as that reflected in 1 Corinthians ix. and the last chapter in the delightful letter to the generous church at Philippi, to find, it may be, not ancient history alone, but very modern, and to discover lessons which need to be taken to heart in our time.

That is a poor loyalty which, having called and trained a minister to preach, is indifferent to the services of the Church, or excuses itself, often for the flimsiest reasons, from the ministrations of the preacher. The Church has a right to expect great things from the man it has set apart. It can scarcely expect too much. So also the preacher

has a right to expect that the Church will untiringly labour to secure the best conditions and the right temperature in which the teaching and administrative functions of the preacher can be carried on.

Indifference, neglect, small criticism, resentment of truth because it cuts across personal preference and desire, these are fatal, alike to the health of the Church, and the success of the preacher. The modern disregard of the solemn claims of worship, the growing habit of Sabbath pleasure-seeking, on the part of Church officials and members, indicates a weakening of loyalty to the Church, and is grossly unfair to the preacher whom it is pledged to assist.

We place a far greater emphasis on this question of happy and unfailing co-operation, in sympathy, in ideal, and in service, than upon the necessary questions of financial support. We do so partly for the reason, that if the one is secured, the other will not fail, but chiefly for the reason, that if there is a practical boycott of the preacher's public ministry, or general indifference to his true mission, no financial considerations will ever atone for that lack.

It is enough here to say, that the duty of the Church to the preacher is not discharged, unless he is removed from all legitimate financial anxiety for his support. This is clearly the argument of 1 Corinthians ix. It is the conclusion of the simplest ethic. And, for the rest, it should be enough to say that it can safely be left to the enlightened conscience of the Church.

9. The supreme care of the Church, including

all its appointments, gifts, and service, is the honour of Jesus. Like Paul we must ever feel and say, "unto him be the glory in the church."[1] For Him we work and for His coming we wait. "He is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence."[2] The world of to-morrow belongs to Him. The issues of the Church, its sufferings and its triumphs, are in His secure possession. The loyalty and the effort are ours. The victory and the glory of it, belong to Him alone.

And if, in any moment of depression, stung by a sense of failure, or sickened by some exhibition of unworthiness, the preacher should be tempted to weaken in enthusiasm, or relax in effort, let him refresh himself by remembering the distinguished succession to which he belongs. Let him recall the splendid history and high achievements of the Church. Let him trace the red stream of sacrifice flowing down through successive generations, making everything to live whither it has come. Then, rising from his momentary depression and from his historical review, let him link himself to that uncounted host who form the membership of the Church triumphant, the helpers of his faith and the sharers of his ideals, and he will return to his work comforted and renewed, as one who has seen the face of the King, and heard afresh His inspiring promise, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."[3]

[1] Eph. iii. 21. [2] Col. i. 18. [3] Matt. xxviii. 20.

CHAPTER XII.

The Preacher's Joy and Crown.

1. THROUGHOUT this study, we have earnestly sought to maintain a truly worthy view of the office and work of the preacher. While its significance for others can never be exaggerated, its claim upon the affection and service of the preacher must know neither competitor nor rival. No effort will be spared to secure the highest possible efficiency. No familiarity will ever be allowed to degenerate into mere routine or commonplace. His horizon will widen as his travel advances, and the realms of attainment yet to be explored will always preserve the freshness and grandeur of his calling.

2. In this estimate of the preacher's work, in the untiring devotion with which the aim of it is pursued, as also in the satisfaction of its assured result, Paul is our greatest human model. That he cherished the honour of his calling, and accepted the opportunity of it with adoring gratitude, is abundantly proved in such declarations as these :— "It was the good pleasure of God, who separated

me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles."[1] "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ."[2]

That he loved his ministry, and found his unceasing delight in teaching and serving, is a truth written across every page of his letters, and declared in every fresh outpouring of his heart. "Ye are in our hearts to die together and live together."[3] "And I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls."[4]

But it was in the fruit and proof of his ministry as seen in the transformed lives of his converts, that he found the highest joy of life. It is given a most fitting expression in his earliest writing :— "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of glorying? Are not even ye, before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For ye are our glory and our joy."[5] While, in acknowledging the affectionate generosity of converts who were the first-fruits of his European labours, he says, in one of his latest letters,[6] "Wherefore, my brethren beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved."[7] Therein is revealed to us the heart of the true shepherd, forgetting all the anguish of loss, and the toil of the weary search

[1] Gal. i. 15. [2] Eph. iii. 8. [3] 2 Cor. vii. 3.
[4] 2 Cor. xii. 15. [5] 1 Thess. ii. 19, 20.
[6] See Dr. Vincent, *Philippians*, International Critical Comm., Intro. xxiv. Also *Peake's Commentary*, p. 872.
[7] Phil. iv. 1.

in the joy of recovery, and in the knowledge that the Great Shepherd and Bishop of souls rejoices that the lost is found. The culmination of the preacher's training, sacrifice, and service, is in the joyous assurance that "day by day those who are being saved,"[1] are added to the Church. With less than this no preacher can be content.

3. When we proceed to examine further the reasons for this lofty estimate of the work of preaching, and this exultation of Paul concerning the fruit of the preacher's work, we are brought face to face with considerations which should never be absent from the preacher's thought :—

(1) Preaching is a Divine commission. The preacher must always feel that he enters the pulpit under the sanction of an authority, he neither can nor desires to disobey. "It was God's good pleasure," said Paul, "through the foolishness of the preaching to save them that believe."[2] And being His pleasure, it becomes at once the obligation and the delight of those upon whom He lays His arresting hand.

The preacher is not responsible for this method of revealing God's will. He is not required to argue for it, much less does he ever need to apologize for it. He accepts it, because God wills it, and is quietly confident that its ample justification will be presently declared in its results. This was what Dr. Horton meant in laying down as the main theme of his Yale Lecture the following proposition :—"Every living preacher must receive his

[1] Acts ii. 47. [2] 1 Cor. i. 21.

message in a communication direct from God, and the constant purpose of his life must be to receive it uncorrupted, and to deliver it without addition or subtraction."[1] It is this which brings the preacher into the line of the true prophetic succession, and makes him in the only worthy sense, "a speaker for God."

If the preaching of the Gospel as a method of Divine appeal to men thus rests upon Divine authority, it follows that neither the Church nor the preacher may, on any pretence, set it aside. Neither the artist, nor the priest, can take the place of the prophet. Art, whether of picture or of music, and ritual, have their place, nor need any attempt be made to disparage their power of appeal. But it cannot be successfully argued that they have the sanction which belongs to preaching, or that they possess the power to accomplish the same beneficent and permanent results. Useful as adjuncts, they should never become the substitutes for preaching.

(2) It will serve as a further justification of this estimate of the preacher's work, if we consider the nature of the service intended by the ministry of preaching. Let the preacher, and indeed his people also, often recall the language of matchless beauty in which Paul sets forth at once the nature and the range of the preacher's work. It will act as a corrective of routine on the part of the preacher, and as a corrective of indifference on the part of the people. With what exquisite delicacy the

[1] Dr. R. F. Horton *Verbum Dei*, p. 17.

nature of the work is described, where the whole passion of a pure, strong man's love for his work, and for his Lord, declares concerning his people, "I am jealous over you with a godly jealousy: for I espoused you to one husband, that I might present you as a pure virgin to Christ."[1] With equal beauty and strength is the range of the preacher's work declared, "whom we proclaim, admonishing every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ."[2]

And if the preacher himself is worthy, if he has worked as eagerly and as earnestly in the realm of the unseen, as his people have toiled for the bread that perisheth, so that he comes to them with the light of the Eternal in his mind and heart, and with the message of the Eternal on his divinely-touched lips, then deep will answer to deep, spirit to spirit will speak. He will have done his people a service not possible to either artist or priest.

It is in such a ministry that the preacher *finds* his people, even as Coleridge declared the Bible *found* him. And such will be the power of the impact, that it will go everywhere and touch everything. The mind of his people will be delivered from error, and their heart from fear. Beauty will take the place of barrenness. Strength and hope will change the scenes of weakness and despair into the homes of happy song. The week will be transfigured with the light of the holy mount. The work of the home, the office, the mill, the mine,

[1] 2 Cor. xi. 2. [2] Col. i. 28.

and the shop, will be weighed and judged in the scales of the sanctuary. The ever-growing culture and sweetness of life will silence criticism. Fresh witnesses will be constantly raised up to go forth and repeat the same glowing testimony elsewhere.

(3) If to that, we add the universal application of preaching as God's instrument, and, so far as we know, His final method of making known His will, we are supplied with a still further justification of the high place accorded to preaching, and the satisfaction of Paul as he contemplates its glorious result.

Whatever may be said as to the place of verses 9–20 in the closing chapter of our earliest gospel,[1] and the command of verse 15: "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to the whole creation," it will be agreed that the Gospel is world-wide in its purpose, and that the argument of Paul is unimpeachable and final. "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?"[2]

We have not to contemplate any successor to or substitute for the preacher. That preaching will ever become obsolete is unthinkable. So long as men need the Gospel, and the work of redeeming men remains an unfinished task, so long will there be a demand and a place for preaching. No hint is ever given in Scripture that it will be supplanted by another method. There will come a time in-

[1] Mark xvi. [2] Rom. x. 14.

deed, when "prophecies shall be done away," and when "tongues shall cease,"[1] but not until Love's final triumph is complete, wherein the Eternal Love will be the only and the universal Law. That however takes us forward toward the consummation of all things, to secure which the preacher works, and the assurance of which forms part of the preacher's joy.

4. We have already referred[2] to the ministry of suffering through which, like his Lord, the preacher reaches his joy. It is impossible to escape it. It should be equally impossible to desire to escape it. It is inherent in the nature of the work itself, in the claim of that Gospel he is called to declare, and in the evil of the world in which his work is done. If the preacher is to stand in "the goodly fellowship of the prophets," he knows that his whole bearing and mission is a constant challenge to the ordinary standards and common practices of the world, and that he must inevitably excite opposition and antagonism.

It is part of his distinctive honour, the price of his joy, that beyond others, he lives the sacrificial life, and ever regards himself as "the servant of all." It begins with the opening of his ministry. It ceases only as he passes into the joy of his Lord's eternal presence.

In accepting his call and separation to the "ministry of the word," he makes the initial sacrifice of the ordinary, yet entirely legitimate material ambitions of men. And he does this without

[1] 1 Cor. xiii. 8. [2] See pp. 218, 224–7.

whine or regret, as the only course possible to him. Nor will such sacrifice ever bulk in either thought or speech. As soon as the pressure of the pierced hand is laid upon him, he will set his face resolutely toward the Jerusalem of his desire as a winner of men, neither listening to those who seek to remind him of what he has renounced, nor tempted by any desire to boast as though he had done some notable and worthy thing.

The initial renunciation of the preacher is maintained as he steadily pursues his ministry. As "God's watchman," he belongs not to himself, but to his fellows, and lives only to do them good. "All things are lawful to him, but not all things are expedient,"[1] and, so that the ministry be not blamed,[2] nor the weakest of men find "occasion of stumbling in him,"[3] he will refuse to allow himself certain diversions, amusements, pursuits, in themselves harmless and legitimate, yet for him not good.

He knows, or should know, that a fierce light beats upon the pulpit, and that he who is set as the "steward of the mysteries of God,"[4] and as the expositor of the high standards of the Gospel must be above suspicion or reproach. Not that he will ever become the ascetic, the pedant or the fanatic, repelling those he seeks to win by a seeming want of breadth, or a wholesome enjoyment of life. He will rather by the winsomeness and charm of his disposition, his sheer delight in the joy of service, and by the fuller "manifestation of the

[1] 1 Cor. vi. 12. [2] 2 Cor. vi. 3.
[3] 1 John ii. 10. [4] 1 Cor. iv. 1.

truth" be constantly "commending his gospel and his Master to every man's conscience in the sight of God."[1]

And what a constant expenditure his work is! Expenditure of which his people know nothing, and for which there is no equivalent of payment in kind. What a ceaseless drain upon his mental and spiritual nature it represents! What soul sweat his study should witness, as even there, the need of his people and the agony of the world stretches out before him! Of what an outgoing of virtue he will be conscious as he stands in his pulpit as God's messenger, and deals with the problems of eternal life! How carefully must he watch, in order to repel the temptations peculiar to his position, and with what anxiety will he guard the strength and the freshness of his early ideals! The temptation to mere professionalism and routine; the fear of man, and what is even more subtle, the favour of man, suggesting the weakening of some much needed rebuke, or the refusal of some Divinely prompted message, which, as the word of the Lord, should be uttered as the prophetic warning for the time! How the preacher will be tempted to consider consequences, and ask whether he is required to risk the inevitable displeasure, and it may be the loss of some, whose favour he would prefer to keep!

Let it never be supposed that the work of preaching and the life of the preacher is the call to a place of ease. It is the most costly vocation on earth.

[1] 2 Cor. iv. 2.

5. But it is also the most precious and the most fruitful in joy, concerning which it is profoundly true, that the joy triumphs in and over the sorrow. If, of all men, the preacher should be the most keenly sensitive, finely trained in every faculty, quick to respond to the slightest approach of need, it clearly follows that such sensitiveness will not be without its answering compensation and reward. For is there not included in it the capacity of exquisite enjoyment? Such an eager appreciation of the beautiful in character, and such a secret delight in the increasing victory of truth over falsehood, and of right over wrong, as openly to share the joy of his Lord, who daily sees the accomplishment of His travail of soul and is satisfied!

This is in truth, the preacher's joy and crown. And its value is so intrinsically precious, it sets forth a result so much to be desired, that we may not lay this study down without making an attempt to understand its constituent elements, and enforce the need of unceasing effort to win it as our own.

(1) Into what royal society and to what rare fellowship the preacher is admitted! "In one of his sonnets Matthew Arnold tells of meeting with a minister, 'ill and o'erworked,' on a broiling August day in the East End of London, and asking him how he fared in that scene of sin and sorrow. 'Bravely,' was the answer, 'for I of late have been much cheered with thought of Christ.'"[1] Dr.

[1] Quoted from Dr. Stalker's *The Preacher and his Models*, p. 201.

Kennedy describes it as an actual incident. Such a possible privilege indeed have all the saints, for none may claim a monopoly of Heaven's King. Yet by the very nature of his work, as a constant attendant upon the business of interpreting and declaring the King's will, the preacher shares this privilege in an eminent degree. And if it is true as the old philosophers laid down, "that we become like that we lovingly look upon," what an opportunity the preacher possesses as he often passes in to the audience room of the King, and looks lovingly upon the ineffable beauty of Jesus!

Further, as a student industriously bent on his Father's business, he has open entrance to the companionship of the world's aristocracy of mind and heart. It too, is an aristocracy entirely impartial and thoroughly democratic, ready to impart its treasures to any inquirer, who is prepared to bring the capacity and the desire to be taught. Books know no distinction of class, and, wisely chosen, as wisely and diligently used, they are prepared to impart their treasure of instruction, and their sources of enjoyment without measure. It may be taken for granted that, so far as means and opportunity allow, the preacher will from time to time gather round him the choicest and the best, seeing that he is called to be an expert in the highest science known to man. In his Yale Lecture, Dr. Jowett describes the preacher's study as an "oratory." What a joy that preacher knows, who, seeking his place of communion and vision as diligently as the merchant his office or the work-

man his bench, unselfishly, always with his people and his work before him, consults his silent friends, and by earnest conference with them constantly enlarges the boundaries of his knowledge!

But, as keeping constantly in touch with the life he seeks to save, the preacher will be the companion and the confidant of his fellow man. One of the secret sources of his joy, and an unfailing incentive to his best effort, will be the study of human life as he sees it in the light of its possible union with Jesus.

The writer recalls with gratitude, as one under obligation, the practice and advice of one whose ministry, in a busy midland industrial centre, was a conspicuous and an abiding success. Week by week through the long years, it was his custom to spend one evening each week in the crowded market-square, listening to the speech of the people, watching their movements, seeking their point of view, and studying first hand the perennially interesting problems of human life. He advised the psychological study of the crowd as they jostled each other in the market place. It corrected a tendency to aloofness, and to a manner of address not sufficiently intelligible to the mind of the average man. In the case referred to, the practice was justified in a ministry which throbbed with a true human interest. And the advice was golden, acting always as a safeguard and a guide.

(2) And what an unfailing source of delight springs from such a first-hand knowledge of life! It will make great demands upon the resources of

the preacher, yet what a gain in the freshness and variety of his teaching! A crowd of interests will always serve to save him from either dulness or monotony. Time will never drag heavily for him, nor will he ever wish to exchange his sphere for less exacting ways of life.

Seeking, finding, guarding, training, will represent a quartette of interests, making up the happy music of laborious days. The unsoiled delights which spring from the sheer joy of serving, will be for him an ample and an abiding heaven. There is surely no vocation known to men so full of the novelty, the awe and wonder of things, as that of the preacher who lives and works among the mysteries and reverences of human life. The truth our Carlyle urged upon his day, needs now to be recalled and pressed, "the true Shechinah is man."

Yet even more, we need to recover our Lord's estimate of the value of the unit, and ponder the significance of His prolonged and careful ministry to the individual.[1] It was He who, while caring for the ninety and nine safely guarded, looked out, and taught us to look out with anxious solicitude for the "one" in peril, declaring the always impressive truth, that "it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."[2]

The modern emphasis is placed on the psychology of the crowd, and modern science tends to dwarf the significance of the unit. The preacher must resist the tendency, and refuse it as an instance of

[1] John iii. 1–15; iv. 1–26. [2] Matt. xviii. 14.

false perspective. It is only from Jesus' reverence for the individual soul, that we pass to a true psychology of universal man.

(3) And when the preacher is permitted to see unfolding before him and before the world, the growing beauty and the widening usefulness of individual character, he shares a joy such as springs from no earthly source. It should be the legitimate, the expected fruit of his ministry. In this respect, says Beecher, "there is no profession so high as that of the Christian ministry." And he adds, "as the sheaves are the proof of good husbandry, so are good men after the pattern of Jesus Christ the only proper test of a good ministry."

This is the process and the issue for which the preacher will plan and work. He will draw his programme of personal character and activity on a scale worthy of such a result. Its ideal will be constantly before him in vision and in longing. He will look for the first signs of its unfolding more eagerly than the husbandman searches for the earliest promise of the later harvest. It will determine all his studies, and decide the plan of his public teaching. Such will be his faith in the transforming power of truth, to overcome natural tendencies and make radical changes in established habits of life, that no effort will be spared to secure so worthy a result. No disappointment will daunt him, nor will any delay exhaust his patience. Knowing that he deals with life, and with the laws of growth, he will be sustained by the steadiness

of long views, and by the assured glory of the result.

But yet more. The preacher knows that in this realm of life-building, the making of individual character on the grand scale, the shaping of personality according to the mould of Jesus, he possesses a secret and declares a truth unshared and unknown in any other realm. He knows that in this most practical and most essential of all pursuits, his Gospel is the specific and holds the field. It is not even claimed that any religion known to men, can build life of such a quality and according to the measurements of Jesus. Here at least is a field, where the claim and the achievement of Jesus are unique.

He knows further, that in all God's wide domain there is nothing so wonderful and so attractive as human life developed on the model of Jesus; that there is no evidence for His Gospel so cogent and so irresistible, as the argument of changed and ennobled character. Every such witness forms the centre of a new set of influences, which radiate far beyond the limit of human thought, and which, beyond the power of human calculation, contribute to the extension of the kingdom.

It is just here, in the realm of transformed life, representing the many-sided loveliness of the Christian disposition and conduct, that the ministry of the preacher comes to its own.

Looking upon the wonder and the glory of it, gratefully remembering its power as evidence, with its possibilities of ever-widening harvests, the

preacher exultingly exclaims, "Ye are our glory and our joy!"

(4) Growing out of that fact, we discover another element of the preacher's joy, in the enlarging witness and the increasing usefulness of the Church. The Church is the preacher's special care, and for its honour and prosperity he toils and prays without ceasing. It must never be allowed that the Church exists for the preacher, but rather that the preacher lives for the Church. Yet the preacher so feels the honour, the reputation, the prosperity of the Church to be his own, that he suffers if either its honour is imperilled or its decline is registered, even as he particularly rejoices when its fair name is upheld, and its prosperity is conspicuous and constant.

For the preacher understands that when the Church is truly prosperous, and when her converts are many, it is well with the entire community. Her increase registers the achievement of the people's good. Her weakness and decline mean the delay of human progress, and the triumph of the enemy of man. As the guardian of the individual and social good, as the builder of national strength, as preacher of the rights of universal man, and as pledged to the work of bringing in "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,"[1] the living organism of the Church is the mightiest factor in human life. It is therefore everything to the world that the Church should go forward from victory unto victory. And in

[1] 2 Pet. iii. 13.

such a march of triumph, none will more rejoice than the preacher who lives to bring such a triumph near.

(5) But beyond all, and as the goal of all thought and effort, the preacher will find his crowning joy in the assurance of the growing fame of Jesus. It is His increase the preacher seeks. All his life purpose finds expression in the ardent desire to set the Saviour forth.

The perfection of art is so to illustrate it, that the art is forgotten in the wonder and glory of its result. The supreme achievement of preaching is attained when the preacher has succeeded in so hiding himself and his art behind the wonder of his message, and the glory of his Lord, that no man is seen, save "Jesus only." The best sermon is that which sends the people out to discuss the greatness of the truth, not the merits of the preacher, and which in turn, will lead them so to magnify the grace of Jesus, that, concerning Him, the ancient testimony will become the normal experience of our modern world, compelled to say of the Saviour of men, "He could not be hid."[1] No preacher will be content with any success short of establishing the unquestioned supremacy of Jesus.

"That in all things he might have the preeminence."[2] In such glowing words Paul sums up his massive argument, that Jesus is the explanation and the goal of all Divine movement, stretching away from the first dawn of creation to the final consummation of all things

[1] Mark vii. 24. [2] Col. i. 18.

And as the ages grow old, and as the range of His triumph increases, the music of Paul's speech finds an ever enlarging response, breaking forth into ever fresh settings of delightful harmony among those who look and wait and work for His appearing. Is there not in our time a wistfulness of longing, a growing expectation and belief, that the purpose declared by Paul as the crowning work of Divine activity in the world, can be and should be realized even within our own generation ?

May it not be that in the present crisis of our world history, we have reached a time of unprecedented opportunity for our Gospel and for our Lord ? Have we not been brought to the threshold of days great with promise, and encouraging the faith that the crown of world conquest is now open, as never before, to our Redeeming Lord ?

It is on that note of high expectation and victorious faith we end. Any other conclusion for a prophetic religion, established and confirmed by Him who has fulfilled the old, and brought in the new, is impossible and unthinkable. The time is ripe for a world advance toward the final coronation of Jesus as the rightful King of men.

Let the Church throughout all the world, that Church " built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner stone "[1] be wise to discern the signs of the times, and swift to enter doors now thrown wide open as by the hand of God.

[1] Eph. ii. 20.

Granted such readiness of obedience to the eagerness of our Divine Leader, and, far beyond anything perceived by the greatly gifted Jeremiah, the prophet of the New Covenant, we may be privileged to rejoice in the glory of that day when "they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more."[1]

[1] Jer. xxxi. 34.

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